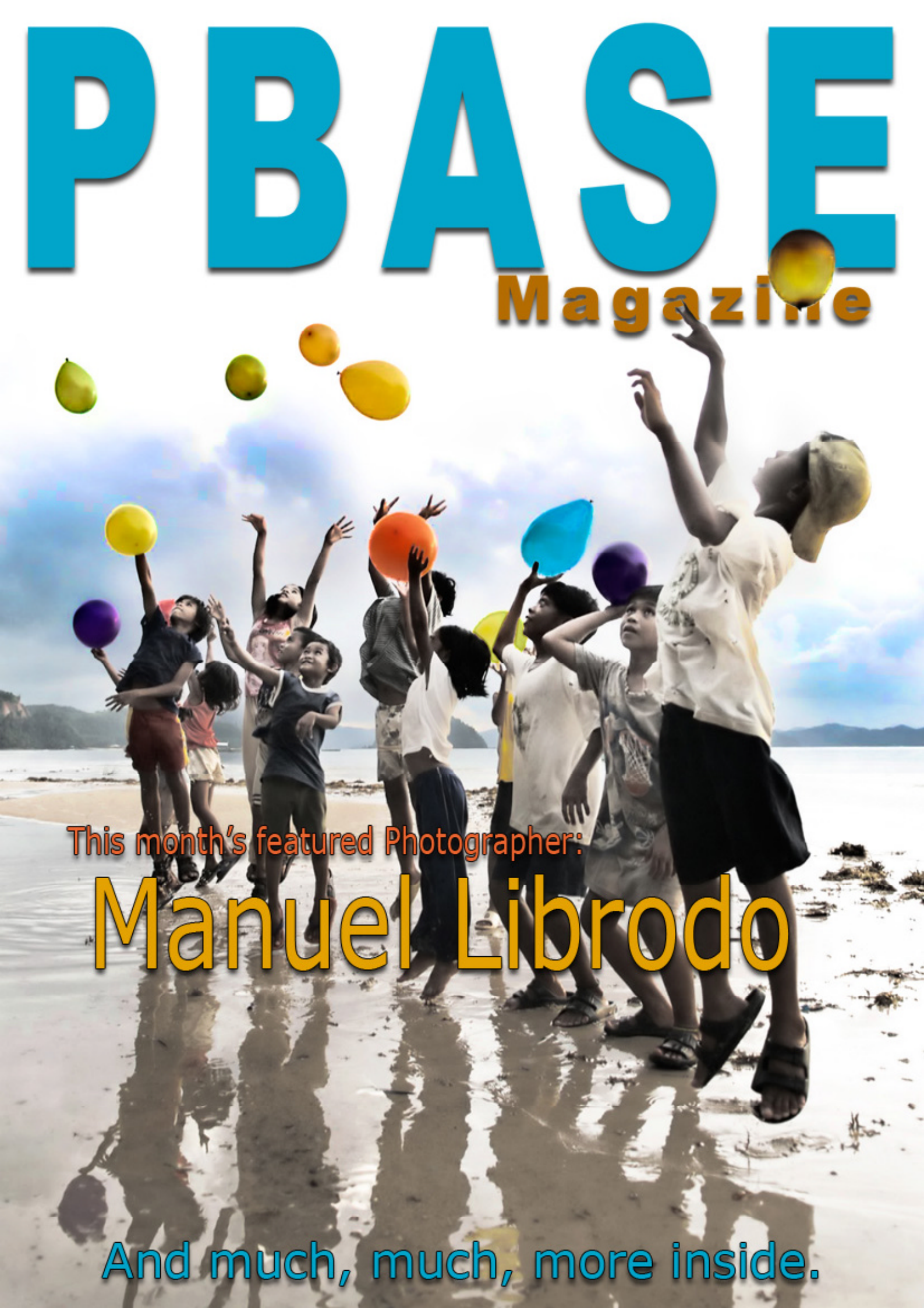
PBASE Magazine



This month's featured Photographer:

Manuel Librodo

And much, much, more inside.

ISSUE 8 | JAN | 2007

PBASE.com MAGAZINE

PHOTOGRAPHY, AS A POWERFUL MEDIUM OF EXPRESSION AND COMMUNICATIONS, OFFERS AN INFINITE VARIETY OF PERCEPTION, INTERPRETATION AND EXECUTION. ~ANSEL ADAMS

Editorial Notes

COVER PHOTO BY MANUEL LIBRODO
DESIGN BY GARY BLANCHETTE

FROM : The Editor's Desk

A very Happy New Year to all readers! The Internet and the digital world has continued to make a significant impact in our lives and how we conduct business. Time magazine, in its 'Person of the Year' issue of 2006, awarded the coveted prize to not one, but to all of us, acknowledging that digitial communication and convergence is fast bridging the gap between people, distances, cultures and timezones.

The PBase Magazine, in it's small way is another example of the digital revolution and the Internet, where a band of volunteers, scattered across the world are able to bring together a quality (we hope!) magazine for amateur photographers with a zero budget and no experience in actually producing magazines.

We use Google's search engine extensively to 'scout the web' for talent we can feature, communicate with selected authors via e-mail, exchange notes and modifications again via email and set the complete layout of the magazine using basic tools such as Microsoft Word and Photoshop. For those photogs who prefer to interview by phone, Eric (in NY) usually sets up a phone interview and records the conversation to an mp3 file which is then transcripted. While Wanda and I exchange notes on proof reading, Gary is emailed the cover and back photographs, and he, sitting in California uses photoshop to create the final versions and emails them back. We then FTP the final articles to the Land of Oz, where Larena uses Adobe to create the final PDF that you read. Thank goodness for email and the digital tools we use.

In this issue, we have a lot of focus on how Photoshop could be used to effectively enhance and change photographs to fit the original vision of the photographer. While using Photoshop to alter images in professions such as photo-journalism are questionable, there are several situations where it is *not important* to retain the originality of the photographed image. In such situations, the author wants to present his vision to the audience. One such example is that of smoke photography in our learning section, by MCsaba, who is a popular participant in the DP-review sony talk forum and has won several challenges with his innovative smoke photography. In this issue, he describes how he achieves such striking photographs using a combined skill of photography and photoshop. Picking up on the queue, Pam, in an expanded Photoshopography section presents several techniques on how to make your 'out of camera' images better and stand out more. Not to be left out, Joe Lasker chimes in with how he converts a simple *slinky* toy into works of art with a lot of imagination and the right lighting.

In the PBase photog section, we interview Manuel Librodo, a fascinating and very talented Filipino photographer, where he takes us on a journey from his childhood to the Manuel of today, talking about his projects, his beliefs and outlook towards life. In the pro section, we feature Greg Raymond, a well known professional photographer who talks about his work and the ethics needed of someone who needs to make a living out of photography. Another interesting article in this issue is the one written by Matt, an ex-Marine Corps photo journalist who talks about the importance of photo journalism.

Our usual articles are all there too – Abba Richman chimes in with his version of Israel, for our culture cauldron section. Shay Stephens is back again (yes, we just like him that much) with a concise review of the Katz Eye optical screen while David Mingay and Lee Rud talk about "PAD" (Photo a Day) and how it builds a strong bond in the PBase photographer community (see, we have our own *YouTube*… of sorts !)

And last, we finally managed to get a hold of the elusive Slug and Emily and asked them questions on the future of PBase and how it has evolved.

Overall, a feature packed issue ! I haven't counted pages, but I think this issue has the most in terms of page count. Hey, we are an online magazine, so we really don't care !

Enjoy!

~ Arjun Roychowdhury
www.pbase.com/arjunrc

PBase Photog: Manuel Librodo

A psychology teacher by profession and a portrait photographer by heart, Manuel Libres Librodo Jr. has spent his four years in photography as a never ending learning experience. As a proud Filipino currently based in Bangkok, Thailand, he wanted to show to the world the beauty of his side of the earth.

PBase Magazine: Tell us about how Manuel the aspiring young teen turned into the Manuel of today

My life is as exciting as any photo I take. I grew up in a mountainous town of Lambunao, Iloilo located in the central islands of Visayas in the Philippines. As the fourth child in a family of six children, life was a struggle for survival and identity. My parents, who were both public school teachers, instilled among us the values of industry and ambition. Thus, I became very academic and eventually graduated at the top of my class in high school.

At work and play

Ever since I was a kid, I always was in awe with everything beautiful. When I was growing up, I remember having nightly dreams about being in a beach with picture perfect blue sky, turquoise water and sugar powder sand. I would always wake up searching for those beautiful shots that I made. These probably were early signs of my unconscious passion towards photography. Or maybe it was because I spent so much of my waking hours staring and marveling at all the beauty around me.

As a teenager, I dabbled into writing and became active in campus politics. What I imagined and visualized were translated into written and spoken words. But somehow I felt that my words frequently failed me in expressing an intense moment of a student rally, for example, or in recording some easy cheerful scenes of friends underneath the warm shade of a tree.

People always captured my fancy and fantasy. There is so much to explore in the human face. Looking at expressive faces in glossy magazine was almost heaven for me. When I became a teenager, I could sit in one corner of the school and just observe people passing by. I never thought this people-watching behavior would benefit me later as a photographer.

After graduation from the University of the Philippines in the Visayas, I worked in various jobs as language instructor (with the U.S. Peace Corps), research assistant, and regional marketing assistant before I eventually became a teacher. Right now, I am a Psychology teacher to junior and senior high school students at Ruamrudee International School, Bangkok, Thailand. Photography is something I do during weekends and holidays.

PBM: Many photos in your gallery seem to be taken with exceptional and controlled lighting. Do you prefer to shoot in a studio or outside with natural light?

Some people say I have a gift of finding the light. It is something that I developed as most of my photography to date has been done using natural light. The constraints of my current job does not permit more elaborate set-ups. But I understand there is a world of photography based on controlled lighting in a more controlled environment. It is something that I intend to develop to prepare for a future where I can shoot creatively in both worlds.

PBM: Please describe your studio for us (equipment and setting)

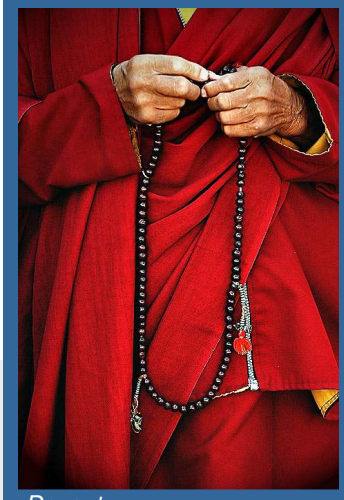
The entire world is my studio and the sun provides all the light I need to create my photographs!

PBM: In one of your galleries you write "I live in this part of the world where beauty is everywhere." It is obvious that you are deeply in love with your land. How would you describe the Philippines to an outsider?

HE SAYS:

"My life is as exciting as any photo I take. I grew up in a mountainous town of Lambunao, Iloilo located in the central islands of Visayas in the Philippines. As the fourth child in a family of six children, life was a struggle for survival and identity. My parents, who were both public school teachers, instilled among us the values of industry and ambition"

Coins



Devout

PROFILE

NAME: MANUEL LIBRES LIBRODO JR.

WEBSITE: WWW.PBASE.COM/MANNY_LIBRODO

FROM: LAMBUNAO, ILOILO, PHILIPPINES

YEARS AS PHOTOGRAPHER: 4+

PHOTOGRAPHY STYLE: PRIMARILY PORTRAITURE

EQUIPMENT: NIKON D200, 70-200MM F2.8 NIKKOR LENS, 17-55MM F2.8 NIKKOR LENS, 60MM F2.8 NIKKOR LENS

I live most of my days now in Thailand but home for me is always the Philippines. I love both countries. How do I describe them to an outsider?

The Philippines is a land of passion. Everything that you see around is a product of love. Even nature. The people are intense and expressive. Nature wears a rainbow colored robe.

Eye

Thailand, on the other hand, has a colorful beauty in calmness. Despite the splash of colours all over the place, this country smiles with quiet serenity and graceful repose. It can be mysteriously flamboyant. It is a paradox.

PBM: What is the most important element for you in what you would term as a 'good photograph'?

Light. The photo has to show a flirtatious light. Even if the picture is technically perfect, it never grabs an attention if the light captured is conservative. While taking photos, my eyes are unconsciously scouring for shadow and light. While viewing pictures, I look for the play of these two elements. They add drama to the scene. They make the picture lyrical.

Kusamba

PBM: What sort of retouching do you find yourself doing for your photos?

Colours are something I cannot live without. Thus, I always find myself tinkering with Photoshop to saturate the colours. If I choose to portray some of my pictures in BW, I want the texture and colour range to be very well-defined thus I play around with the sharpening tools. But as I always tell my workshop participants, all I do in Photoshop are merely enhancements of what already are in the original picture. It is kind of ironic that I spend more time post-processing an image that I want to look natural.

PBM: If I were to ask you for two images in your entire galleries, which you would select to be your favourites, which would they be and why?

www.pbase.com/manny_librodo/image/58292335
(ed: see sidebar image titled Rosalinda)

Taken in Iloilo City, Philippines.

She is Rosalinda, mother of eleven, a cigarette vendor. There's a lot more to tell. But I don't want to state the obvious. Just take a closer look and examine every line in her wrinkles. The saying that "some pictures are worth a thousand words" is an understatement in the case of Rosalinda. Any picture of her is worth *a thousand of stories with a million words*.

www.pbase.com/manny_librodo/image/49638476
(ed:see sidebar image titled Peers)
Taken in Kanchanaburi, Thailand.

I love children. They have the most spontaneous emotions and they are so expressive… sometimes, way too expressive.

Intimidated – that's how I felt when a group of young boys rushed to me while I was *shooting* one of their peers. But why should I? I stood my ground and continued to fire. When the smoke cleared out, victory was declared from both sides. They had their moment of handsome glory and I had one of the best candid moments frozen in time.

PBM: Your gallery for "unusual fashion" is indeed very unusual when compares to other fashion shoots, yet strikingly artistic. How do you plan such shoots? Do you have an image in mind or do you go with the flow of a situation?

I never considered my work as Fashion Photography. How could I when all I did was photograph my students in veils? I hardly included the whole body in a picture simply because my students wear uniforms from waist down. In my last trip back home to the Philippines, a Manila-based photographer, Arnel Murillo, asked if I would like to try my hand on high fashion shots. The location was something I was not familiar with until the day of the shoot. Everything was spontaneous. No drawing board to speak of… we just shot by impulse and from the heart. It was also a break-in of my then new 17-55 f2.8 Nikkor lens. I am quite pleased with the results.

PBM: Describe for us a particularly challenging photo shoot, from conceptualization to completion

The photo shoots with my students are probably the most challenging ones. I had to do it in school using a non-professional model during or after school hours. Lighting was not controlled and I had to look for a less busy spot in the school to do my shots. I had to use a lot of ingenuity to create

Rosalinda

Peers

"The Philippines is a land of passion. Everything that you see around is a product of love. Even nature. The people are intense and expressive. Nature wears a rainbow colored robe. "

Refreshing

props. I had to use my knowledge in Psychology to draw something out from my students. I often had some goals but ended up abandoning them because of some constraints. My childhood days in photography were fraught with a lot of challenges and it made me a 'survivor'.

Drip

PBM: A majority of your images are taken with the Nikon D200. Do you think this is the ultimate camera for you, or do you plan to upgrade? If yes, what's on your list?

Good news: Nikon Philippines will sponsor my next gear - a Nikon D2X. Hopefully, by the time this interview is out, I also am out shooting with my new camera.

Speaking of upgrades, tell us about your first camera and the various iterations you went through till today.

Hay play

Since I couldn't afford a camera until I started working, I had been borrowing cameras left and right. My first serious purchase was a Nikon Coolpix 4500 four years ago. Because that camera was flower-friendly, I thought I would sink my teeth deep into macro photography. Then I borrowed my brother's Nikon D100 and shot some nice portraits. The very next day (sometime in 2004), I bought my own Nikon D70. I lost it in a cab on November of 2005. It was a signal to upgrade and I thus became a proud owner of a Nikon D200 on December of 2005.

PBM: How is the photography community in Philippines, from a personal and professional angle?

Very intimate. Although I shoot mostly here in Thailand, I interact with Filipino photographers more through here. Personally, I feel more at home shooting along and sharing my passion with them. Professionally, everyone is supportive of each other. But since I am not doing this yet for a living, I am not aware of what it is like in the 'market'.

PBM: You mentioned that you conduct workshop. What do you teach there and how often do you conduct them?

When I had an exhibit in the Philippines, the gallery owner convinced me to conduct a workshop. What was intended as a one-weekend workshop became a three-weekend workshop. A full-day workshop includes a half-day of photo session with a model and another half-day of post-processing. Right now, I conduct mostly one-on-one workshops on weekends here in Bangkok. I limit myself to a maximum of 2 workshops in a month.

PBM: Did you ever consider holding international workshops?

I actually did conduct 2 weekend workshops in Singapore because it is easy to fly there on a Friday and come back to Bangkok on a Sunday (for my daytime job). There are many requests (one from as far as Trinidad and Tobago). Only time will tell.

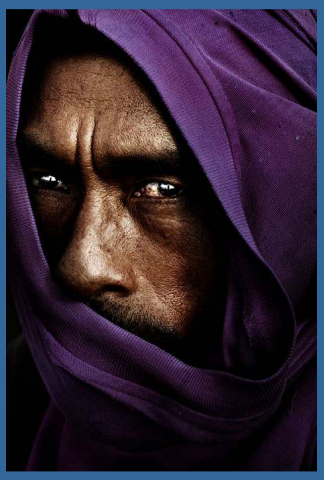
PBM: Which is your favorite portrait lens and why?

I'd say it is my relatively new 17-55 f2.8 Nikkor lens. I like shooting wider now to include a bit of the environment and this lens fits the bill. Next to this is the 60 mm f2.8 Nikkor's macro lens. Yes, a macro lens. Amazing details especially for someone who likes to capture the story in the eyes.

Lotus mood

PBM: Do you sell your photographs? If so, which is the most effective sales medium for you? (Internet, publishers etc.)

I sold images to companies and private persons from all over the world, whether in print or digital form for use in their websites, company literature or ads. I also was able to sell some framed



Desolation

"Some people say I have a gift of finding the light. It is something that I developed as most of my photography to date has been done using natural light. The constraints of my current job does not permit more elaborate set-ups. But I understand there is a world of photography based on controlled lighting in a more controlled environment. It is something that I intend to develop to prepare for a future where I can shoot creatively in both worlds."

The wait

photos during my exhibit in the Philippines. I also realize there is a big market out there so let's see what tomorrow brings.

PBM: Why did you join PBase and how (if at all) has PBase helped you in your passion for photography?

When I was active in one community of photographers, I saw my friends linking their posts to pbase.com. I remembered spending almost 3 hours straight just staring at the beautiful pictures posted here. It also is very easy to locate pictures and navigate through heaps and heaps of outstanding images. I then joined in 2004 and the rest is history, so to speak.
I owe a lot to PBase. Magazines and publications discovered me here. But the best thing that PBase has bestowed on me are is the gift of friendship with fellow photographers. There are so many to mention that I will possibly run out of space. But let me especially acknowledge two very close friends whom I've met here: Bobby Wong www.pbase.com/bobbyw and Lawrence Rhipser www.pbase.com/scared_of_the_dark.

They have contributed a lot to my growth as a photographer by challenging me to get out of the box and explore more of the world of photography.

PBM: Finally, what advice would you have for those who say "I wish I could shoot like Manuel Libres Librodo Jr."

Learn how to use the veils (*laughs)*

Seriously, be spontaneous. Learn how to laugh and cry with your subjects. Don't let the technicalities bog you down. I haven't had any formal lesson in Photography so I consider myself a tabula rasa, a blank tablet. I can take any kind of shot in any kind of situation (for as long as there is ambient lighting). What makes a picture beautiful to me is a something that speaks to the heart. Let your picture sing! Even if it's out-of-tune, it still is making a statement that people cannot ignore.

Wind

Mystic

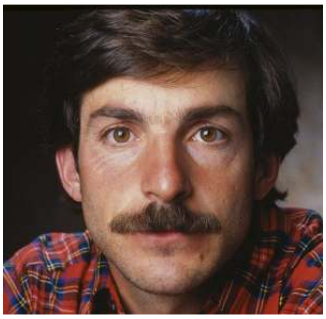
Brothers

Boys will be boys

Our thanks Bobby Wong Jr., who recommended Manuel's galleries for the PBase photog section. Bobby wrote to us saying *"His albums are among the highest ranking on PBase and his work is truly outstanding. I've attended one of his workshop and I believe his words of wisdom can be quite interesting to the readers of this magazine"*

If you would like your name to appear in our "Thumbs Up" box above, please continue to email us with recommendations on photographers you would like us to feature. Also, please don't forget to tell us how the person you are recommending inspires you.

Please email your comments and suggestions to magazine@pbase.com



PRO-CORNER:Greg Raymond

J. Gregory Raymond bought his first camera, a Nikon FE 35mm some camera 26 years ago, hoping to send photos back home to friends and family that chronicled both his overseas teaching job and his subsequent travels.His overseas work and his "Polynesian lifestyle" never did come full circle Raymond never put his camera down completely and began shooting locally. Over a short period of time - coupled by countless errors, novice stumbling and uncertainty, Raymond taught himself the finer nuances of working camera and how to print photos. Greg went to work professionally with Gannett Newspapers in White Plains, NY and stayed as a staff photographer for 6 years. Raymond has been in business for some 20 years and his images have graced dozens of newspapers, magazines, annual reports, and sports leagues and books. He lives in Stamford, CT with his wife Priscilla, son Sam, 16, and daughter Jennifer, 14. His dog, Oliver, likes him too.

PBase Magazine: Can you tell us how you became interested in photography?

I actually became interested in photography a lot sooner than I knew. For years when I was in college, I was an English major with the thought of going into teaching and writing. Unknown to me I had a real interest in photography, as I would spend hours in the library going through old LIFE magazines during their hey days of the 30s and 40s. It wasn't until I was going to go into the peace corps, when I actually picked up a camera (through a present my parents had given me), figuring that once I was overseas I would send them pictures. About a month before I was set to travel, I was told that because I had asthma as a kid, I couldn't go. Lo and behold - I went into teaching and writing for a few years. I got into the field professionally after a number of people told me that my "pictures were unbelievable, I should look into it." I never really thought about it until I figured, "Why not?!" I started with a local paper and quickly moved on to a Gannett Suburban Newspapes in White Plains where I was a staff photographer and was there for six years.

PBM: Besides photography, do you take interest in any other forms of art?

Photography is my major form of expression, although as I said, I have written many articles before and I was a writer before I was a photographer. So I've done a mix of both.

PBM: Your profile client list is very impressive. Which was your first paid job in photography?

My first paid job was actually with a newspaper and one of the first things I did as a writer (when I was doing more written work and prose), was to go back to my old kindergarten school and spend an entire day there with my old teacher and just find out how things have changed twenty years later. I stayed with the class for the entire day and documented what they did. That was really my first "gig" as a photographer and writer, but it was more prose as opposed to purely photography.

Insane clown posse bride

PBM: Can you tell us who you are currently working for and for which clients?

I'm working on a mix of things right now as I always have been since leaving the newspaper business. I still do work for the larger newspapers (the *LA Times,* the *Gannett corporation*, the *New York Times)*, but most of my work these days is a mix between corporations, advertising, professional sports, some PR work, some weddings and similar. Really nothing different than what I did during my newspaper days, except that now I am my own boss and working longer hours.

But it's a great job!

PROFILE

NAME: J. GREGORY RAYMOND

WEBSITE: HTTP://WWW.JGREGORYRAYMOND.COM/

FROM: CONNECTICUT, USA

PHOTOGRAPHY STYLE: PHOTOJOURNALISM

YEARS AS PHOTOGRAPHER: 20+

EQUIPMENT: CANON EOS 1D MARK II ,CANON 20D ,CANON EOS 1D'S ; ROLLIOFLEX 2 1/4; LENSES 16-35MM 2.8 L; 28-70MM 2.8 L; 70-200MM 2.8 IS L ;300MM 2.8 L USM ; 400MM 2.8 L SERIES II USM; AND MORE….

HIGHLIGHTS:

"The first thing that anybody should do is to get a great portfolio. That is something that takes time. If I were to start out today coming out of high school or college, I would try to get an internship or try to get work in assisting some of the pros out there.

If you really want to go into this field and learn hands on, from the street level, there is no better way than learning right next to a pro. You can certainly learn in the classroom, but it's a question living it and learning it vs. reading about it in a class."

Blinded buffalo

PBM: What is your trick to getting these clients and continue getting repeat business ?

The first thing that anybody should do is to get a great portfolio. That is something that takes time. If I were to start out today coming out of high school or college, I would try to get an internship or try to get work in assisting some of the pros out there.

If you really want to go into this field and learn hands on, from the street level, there is no better way than learning right next to a pro. You can certainly learn in the classroom, but it's a question living it and learning it vs. reading about it in a class.

PBM: How important is word of mouth (referrals) in your business ?

Most of my clients are by word of mouth. I never really advertise per se other than banging on doors or occasionally picking up the phone and cold calling. And I never really send out mailers. I tried to take a country doctor approach. That is, I'd rather stay smaller, be entirely hands on, and take complete care of my existing set of clients.

I certainly can go bigger and can take on other apprentices, etcetera, but it is something I always wanted to do: serve my clients needs better and fuller rather than spread myself too thin.

PBM: Bruno Tomasi said that *"People like Greg are hard to find."* What do you think is your best characteristic as a photographer?

Dominican boy

I think the best characteristic that I have, or any photographer could have, is to always have your eyes wide open. The beauty of this business is there is a certain serendipity factor of not knowing what exactly is going to happen. It's often those happy little instances where all of a sudden everything comes together. That's what I am looking for. A lot of times it happens by just keeping your eyes open and being available to look for other things above and beyond the pre conceived notions you may have had prior to going into a shoot.

PBM: Your photography ranges from special events to portraits to photojournalism to sports – really everything. What is your advice to amateur photographers on the merits of focussing only on one field vs. a varied interest ?

Oh sure, they could focus on one field and concentrate on that fully too. I've just always felt that my real interests are varied and as such I'd like to maintain the same variety and the same ability to go in different directions, be it editorial, advertising, or corporate work.

Man's best friend

I think as a photographer, you have to be a jack of all trades to some degree, not only with being able to change and interact well with your clients, be it corporate people or celebrities, sports figures, but you have to be able to mesh with them and be able to go in different directions. Because often it's not going to go as smoothly as you would like to, nor should it unless you want complete control over the shoot from beginning to end.

I like to keep an open mind so if some little happy accident happens, fine, we shoot it. Sometimes it works and sometimes it doesn't. That's the beauty of the business that we are in. It can be an open canvas. Basically every day, something new is going to pop up and every day you have the opportunity to go in different directions and approach photography in different ways.

And sometimes it doesn't work out.

PBM: Has there ever been a time when you were on the job and made a horrible mistake?

Oh, you mean like putting E-6 (slide film chemistry) in C-41 (color negative chemistry)?!***** I guess!

Yes, that has happened before, suddenly realizing before you go into a photo shoot that the focusing screen that you put in your F3 was just a little hair off and that the entire wedding you shot was out of focus. And you didn't notice this until you got the developed film back. Yes, that has happened and thankfully only once in my life. It's an eye opener and goes to show you that errors can happen in the best and the worst of circumstances.

***** In the older processing days, a Wing Lynch machine took care of all the color films that photojournalists shot that particular day. Ever so often, a staff photographer would forget to change the chemistry in the Wing Lynch, so it didn't match the film type he/she was using and the results were cross processed – film that looked like it had been "polarized." It was not much use, very funky, a black and white print which needed a lot of handiwork and was the best result of this chemical and human mess.

Rainy day Volkswagon

"I think as a photographer, you have to be a jack of all trades to some degree, not only with being able to change and interact well with your clients, be it corporate people or celebrities, sports figures, but you have to be able to mesh with them and be able to go in different directions. Because often it's not going to go as smoothly as you would like to, nor should it unless you want complete control over the shoot from beginning to end"

PBM: So then what did you do in that one instance?

Luckily enough, I had a backup camera, so the entire shoot wasn't ruined. It was certainly compromised a lot greater than I would have liked. The fact that I had a second camera body and could at least salvage half of it left me with at least a few donuts in the box! I had something to give to the client other than my cheapest excuse that I felt terrible. And I did.

Restaurant of no return

PBM: You have shot celebrities like Gene Wilder as well as regular non-celebrity events such as weddings. What are the advantages and disadvantages of both?

When it comes to photographing celebrities or everyday people or people on the street, the main thing is to put the people completely at ease. I'm of the opinion that the best pictures are probably the ones that are not forced - they're very natural, they're very relaxed, nothing contrived about them.

That's probably why I am more of a photojournalist than a portrait specialist. I think it is the photographer's job to put their client at ease and create an environment where it is a give and take. Because ultimately, the people on the other end of my lens are just as important, if not more so, because they are giving their time, their expressions, as well as allowing me to direct them.

PBM: What has been a photo shoot that has really stood out in your mind?

Probably the photo shoots that I enjoy the most are the ones that I learn from, that I can take something away from. That learning could come from going on an airlift with America Cares or working with kids with cancer or going into areas that most people don't see and I'm ignorant to before going in there myself.

So when you go into something like that you have to be sensitive to what you are looking at. You're seeing something that is very moving. You want to tell the story and have the pictures speak for themselves without you sounding off any kind of horn. When I get into such situations, I like to take a step back, use a longer lens, try not to use flash unless it is absolutely necessary, and blend in and become part of the story. The subjects are the story themselves so I don't want to interfere with that. I want to chronicle what it is that I'm trying to capture.

PBM: That brings us to when you are shooting weddings and Bar/Bat Mitzvahs. What do you do to be unique and really make your photographs aesthetically pleasing as well as document the moment?

It's funny because I have been doing weddings and Bar Mitzvahs for many years now. Originally I used to cringe ever so slightly when doing it, but now I absolutely adore going to these events because it is such a celebration of life. It is such a special time in the bride's and groom's family. It's their day. Where relatives and cousins from all over come together.

And while the actual ceremony itself can vary from one to another, it's the celebration, the coming together, the dancing, the laughing, the uncertainty, the blood, sweat and tears that define the moment. I try to capture it in such a way that I am in the outside looking in, but on the inside looking out. That said, when they are doing a hora dance or other dances, I am usually in there with a 16 to 35 millimeter and have the action happen all around me.

Bridesmaid's dance

PBM: You have been in this business for more than twenty years. How have you seen it change?

The main changes that I see other than the obvious technological changes, is first and foremost because we are now digital. A lot of the news organizations, the magazines, even the advertising houses themselves, have lost their camaraderie around the light table where you would go into a paper or a magazine after a day's assignment and you would meet all the other photographers on deadline.

You would see their work, they would see yours, there would be an exchange of ideas and certainly a real learning process there. Because everybody is working from a laptop, or from home, or transmitting from Starbucks, you don't have that anymore. Everybody, it seems is working independently, so that sharing of ideas, the ability to see other people's work, to ask questions, is certainly not there anymore. From a standpoint of learning photography, from the darkroom basics to burning and dodging to color printing, that's

"When it comes to photographing celebrities or everyday people or people on the street, the main thing is to put the people completely at ease. I'm of the opinion that the best pictures are probably the ones that are not forced - they're very natural, they're very relaxed, nothing contrived about them"

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"Because everybody is working from a laptop, or from home, or transmitting from Starbucks, you don't have [that camaraderie] anymore. Everybody, it seems is working independently, so that sharing of ideas, the ability to see other people's work, to ask questions, is certainly not there anymore. From a standpoint of learning photography, from the darkroom basics to burning and dodging to color printing, that's missing too because that's gone the way of the computer and Photoshop"

missing too because that's gone the way of the computer and Photoshop.

PBM: Recently, there has been a lot of trouble with photojournalists using Photoshop. Do you use Photoshop? How do you use it?

I use Photoshop just to sharpen,crop, put the cut line on the images and to clean up the images, per se. If it is a little dark or the color is off, certainly I am going to adjust the color to enhance the image as much as possible, without changing the colors that were originally there to begin with.

I would be doing that anyway if I was printing color itself, or in the darkroom trying to make a print a little bit more "contrasty" or put more of an emphasis on the character and do the old *Missouri Burn* where you would burn the edges of a photo down to enhance the image in the center of the photo. Other than that, there's really not much more difference and if there is, where you are crossing the line or adding things to pictures or changing the integrity of the photo itself, yes, that is where ethics collide right there.

Strike zone, little league style

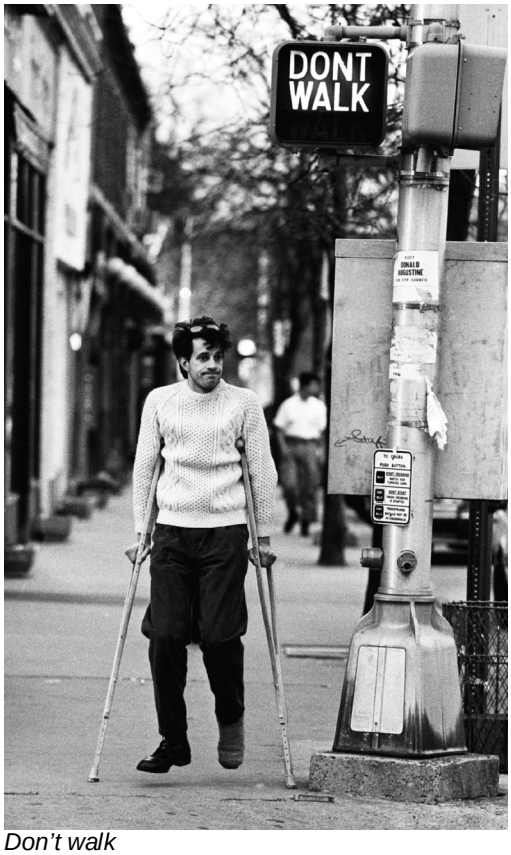
PBM: Finally, you have been doing this for so long, what still energizes you to get up and do your work?

To be honest with you, it is the uncertainty that each day brings. The beauty of my business, or any photography business, is that you never quite know what's out there and what you are going to do. That could be not knowing what assignments could come by or what the actual assignment is going to be. Sometimes you go in there with a preconceived notion that the assignment is going to be such-and-such and then through whatever changes of the environment or the people in the assignment not allowing you to do what you'd like to do, it changes into something else. You have to be adaptable for that.

The bottom line being: you have to bring something back which is complementary to the people who hire you. You have to bring something to the table, above and beyond what your editors or client wants there because that's what's going to keep the phone ringing and keep you in business in the long run.

PBM: Greg Raymond, thank you so much for your time.

Thank you!



Don't walk

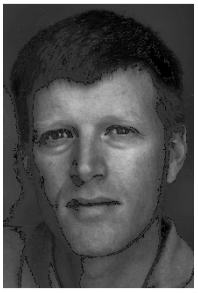
"The bottom line being: you have to bring something back which is complementary to the people who hire you. You have to bring something to the table, above and beyond what your editors or client wants there because that's what's going to keep the phone ringing and keep you in business in the long run"

EXTRA:

Listen to the interview recording here !

Please email your comments and suggestions to magazine@pbase.com

INSIGHT: Photo-Journalism matters

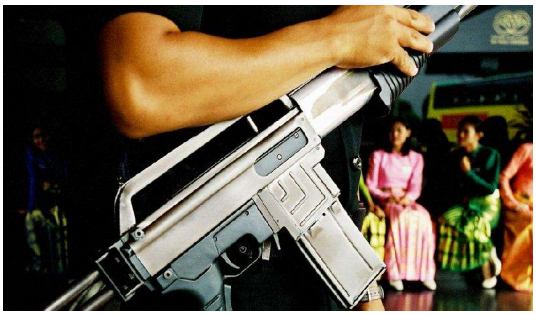


Matt Hevezi grew up in Northern California and joined the Marine Corps in 1987. His career as a photojournalist was not planned. In 1990, while assigned as a hazardous materials handler in Japan, the military was downsizing. With no room to reenlist in his unit, [the Marines] offered him a photojournalism position. He began writing and taking pictures for Camp Pendleton's base newspaper, The Scout. The Marine Corps trained him in an "OJT" correspondent. Matt eventually trained formally at Syracuse University in 2000. Before his transition to civilian life in 2005, Matt covered for the Marine Corps stories like: President Bush; San Diego firestorms of 2003; the 1992 LA riots; sporting festivals in Micronesia; Thai orphans; and United Nations DMZ operations on the Iraq-Kuwait border. As a civilian, he remains an advocate for all PJ's who do the important work telling important stories in pictures. Matt now covers military issues for civilian publications as an independent journalist. He is based in Southern California.

The diversity of photographers at PBase.com is wonderful. PBase is truly a melting pot of visual nutrition. When I discovered PBase a few years ago, I was serving in the military as a photographer. My archive was growing to a point where I needed a way to get my images organized. I was also looking for a simple, easy-to-use photo Website to share my work with others.

Infantrymen from Company F, 2nd Battalion, 3rd Marine Regiment, patrol in the jungles of Northern Okinawa

Because competent photo editors are a dying breed in the military photo community and the craft of photography in the military – more specifically, photojournalism – has become more and more of a devalued commodity since the mid 1990s, I sought an inexpensive online resource that would allow civilian professional photographers and editors to see and critique my photography. PBase provided me that resource.



Locked and loaded, a security guard keeps watch as buyer hostesses wait for customers outside Bangkok's largest retail diamond and jewelry retail shopping mall.

I trained early in my career mostly as a military photojournalist. I assure you, there was once a time in the military when good, important, storytelling photography mattered. But somewhere along the way, public relations concerns eclipsed the value of military photojournalism. The steeped traditions of great picture making – from the photographers of World War II, Korea, Vietnam and even Desert Storm – by military photographers lost its luster, appeal and importance among most of today's top military leaders.

While photographing Marine infantrymen during jungle warfare training in Okinawa, Japan, I shot this photo of a Marine taking a cigarette break. Nearly all the grunts in his platoon were out of money and smokes. The smell of the first one lit attracted keen attention from the smokers who had none.

Although there are still some very fine military photographers serving and producing pictures today, most of their best work is not available to the public. If an image made by a military photographer does not carry, compliment or support an authorized "theme" or "message," the image will, more often than not, remain archived and unseen.

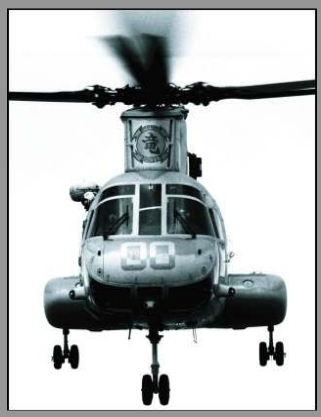
I first came to realize the important responsibility that was charged to military photographers back in 1993 when I met the great Eddie Adams. For those readers who do not recognize the name, Eddie was a highly accomplished -- and celebrated -- photographer who served as a U.S. Marine Corps correspondent and survived his assignments covering combat in the Korean War. He went on to the Associated press, a number of magazines and finally served as Parade magazine's chief photographer.

Eddie passed away Sept. 19, 2004, after a battle with Lou Gehrig's disease. I met Eddie at a reunion of Marine Corps combat correspondents who gathered outside Hartford, Conn., in 1993. I was a corporal then -- a rookie military photojournalist -- and attending the event to receive an award for photo coverage of Camp Pendleton Marines serving in Compton, Calif., during their call-up to help quell riots in April 1992 following the acquittal of the Los Angeles policemen who beat Rodney King. (Unfortunately,

CAPTURED MOMENTS:

This photograph is a portrait of a 9-year-old Thai boy who fights for tourists' entertainment, tips to support his family and the benefit of local gamblers at a Muay Thai kickboxing venue in the tourist district of Pattaya Beach, Thailand.

"Because competent photo editors are a dying breed in the military photo community and the craft of photography in the military – more specifically, photojournalism – has become more and more of a devalued commodity since the mid 1990s"



The U.S. Marine Corps' fleet of CH-46 Sea Knight helicopters is scheduled to be replaced by the tilt-rotor MV-22 aircraft that many Marines have nicknamed the "flying coffin." Okinawa, Japan.

the Marines had no formal photo archive regulations at the time and they "misplaced" my negatives from that assignment.)

After all the pomp and circumstance of the banquet, guest speakers and ceremonies -- the kind of things I never really cared for much anyway -- Eddie invited me to sit down and chat.

I had no idea at the time that I was in the presence of photojournalism greatness. But I could glean from the king-like treatment he received from all the old-timers in attendance that he was some sort of big-shot and that he must have done something to command high respect.

U.S. Marine Corps combat correspondents, the new generation of uniformed photographers, writers, videographers and artists, enjoy a night of camaraderie at their annual awards banquet in 2002. Orlando, Fl.

We broke bread and the tops of a few bottles. I honestly cannot recall most of what he spoke to me about except this:

Eddie assured me that my work as a military photographer was a very important business.

A Marine Corps infantryman takes a brief rest during training at Camp Hansen one of the many American military bases located on the small Southern Japanese island of Okinawa.

He told me that the average Joe Marine-- the low-ranking workhorse grunts who suffer the greatest, and sacrifice the most ... and die training for and serving in combat in the name of their unit, military service branch and country -- often are the first to be forgotten. Their acts of bravery and courage are lost for all time unless a military correspondent records their existence living in the mud, snow, desert. Unless you record their stories, Eddie told me, nobody will know what those guys did. Civilian reporters often won't be around, and the burden to tell "the grunts' story" is only on your shoulders Matt. He spoke in the most solemn and serious of tone.

The next time Eddie spoke to me was at his photo studio in Manhattan. But he was already gone. But he left behind an upbeat video for those who came to the "celebration memorial" to say farewell to a good buddy, great photographer and mentor to so many. In the video, Eddie sang, danced and encouraged all who knew and cared about him -- and for the craft of photography -- *to keep on keepin' on*. He was and still is a great mentor and influence in my efforts as a photographer. It might sound corny, but sometimes I feel as if he is hovering over my shoulder when I am out on the job.

After having been enlightened by Eddie's wise words I find it terribly sad and unfortunate that thousands upon thousands of very important and compelling photos being made by military photographers working today all over the globe have been and will continue to be lost forever. It is an absolute shame. Most of the work presented in my PBase galleries focuses on the subject I know best – the military culture. But I've branched out on occasion and have loaded many non-military images too.

President Bush gets a courtesy salute from Marines and sailors upon arrival at Miramar Marine Corps Air Station, Calif., during a trip to the West Coast to raise campaign funds in 2003

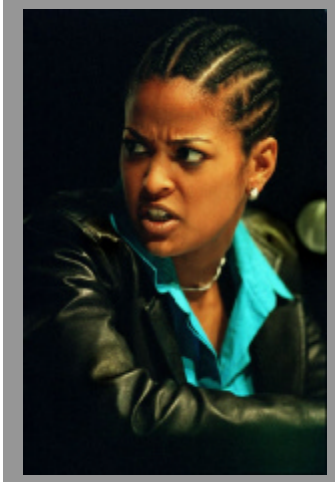
PBase stands as a fantastic resource for photographers of all styles and interests to share their vision with a wide audience. The PBase community has really grown over the years into something wonderful. PBase is a historical visual testament of our global community, both past and present.

It is my simple hope that the photos contained within my galleries offer a tiny, but revealing and appreciated, glimpse into the military world and culture which I existed in for nearly two decades.

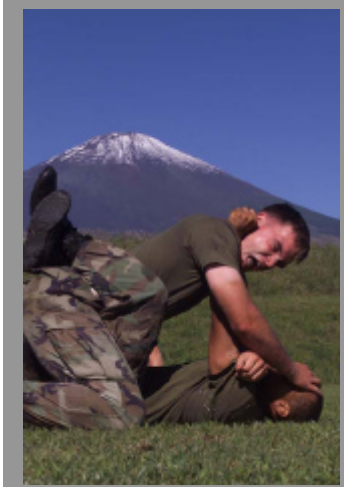
PBase has remained a very simple tool to photographers to share. And in the end, that is just fine with me.

Because when all is said and done, it is *"the picture"* that matters most.

I invite you to return from time-to-time to my page on PBase as I intend to continue to refine and share work with this wonderful community of photographers and all those who appreciate photography of all styles.

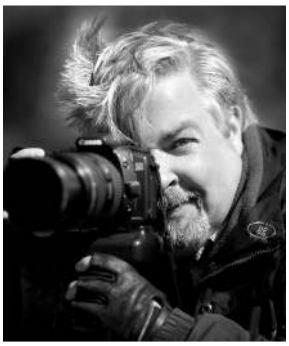


Muhammad Ali's daughter responds with trademark "Ali attitude" after being asked if she would ever fight a man. The photo was taken April 8, 2000, at a post-fight press conference minutes after she knocked out April Fowler at the Turning Stone Casino at Verona, N.Y. The bout against Fowler was Laila Ali's first. Her record today is 23-0. Laila is the world champion at the super middleweight division.



Under the watchful eye of Mount Fuji, Japan, U.S. Marines practice their Martial arts training techniques on each other.

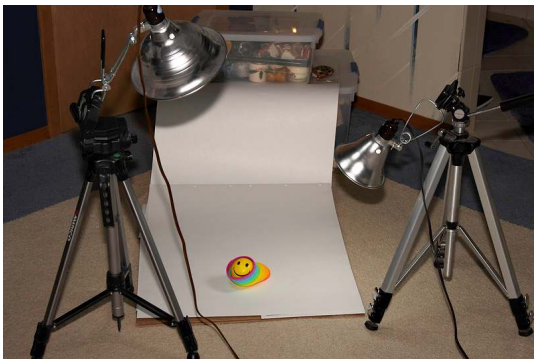
IMAGINATION COUNTS: Slinky Photography



Editor's note: With the right amount of imagination and skills, the simplest of photographs can produce stunning results. We came across Joe's Slinky galleries by accident and loved the innovation he showed with such a simple subject. Enjoy !

Joe Lasker is 52 years old, married with three adult children, living on Long Island, NY. He works for a national jewelry retail chain, currently vice president in charge of finance and MIS. He has had an interest in photography since he was a child using his dad's Kodak Duaflex II with 620 roll film. In 1973 he bought his first SLR, the Pentax Spotmatic IIa, and used that along with various point and shoot cameras, first film, then digital. His true passion for photography started when he bought his first Canon DSLR in late 2003. He joined some user's groups and set up a PBase site, and was able to share and learn from other photographers, both beginners and skilled. Besides working on the basics such as composition and lighting, he has dedicated a lot of time to studying post processing techniques to get the greatest impact he can from his images

The Slinky was a promotional gift I received from Copper Hill about a year ago. It sat on my desk until last month, when I walked in one morning to see the smiling yellow ball peaking out at me. Seems it was a promotional item from one of the banks we deal with, and someone put it in the Slinky that morning. I immediately decided that the combination would make an interesting picture, so I took them home. On a Sunday afternoon, I set up some poster boards on the floor of my bedroom, attached two 5600K florescent bulbs in clamp on reflectors from my shop to two old tripods, and set them up for the lighting.



I took about 60 shots, setting it up in various poses, shooting in Av mode with the Canon EF 85mm f/1.2L II and the Canon EF 24-105 f/4 L IS on the Canon 20D. I varied the f-stops to get different depth of fields for different looks.
After loading the images into Capture One, I saw that the lighting wasn't strong enough to make the background as white as I wanted it, so after setting levels and then boosting the saturation by 3% in C1, I processed the RAW files to ProPhotoRGB and opened them in the new Adobe Photoshop CS3 Beta.

I made a curves adjustment layer, pulled the center of the curve up to the point that the background was as white as I wanted it, then using the magic wand selection tool, working the selection with the Shift (+) and Alt (-) keys, I was able to select the whole background. I used the new Refine Edges window to get the edge of the selection as smooth and as clean as I could, then inverted the selection and painted over the mask to bring back the original color and exposure of the slinky and ball. I then flattened the image, ran a USM (Unsharp Mask) of 10%, 250px 0 threshold to increase the local contrast and make the image "pop" a little. I then ran a framing action that resizes the image and converts to 8bit sRGB for posting to PBase.

Toddler

SLINKY FUN!

Wheeeeeee!

"The Slinky was a promotional gift I received from Copper Hill about a year ago. It sat on my desk until last month, when I walked in one morning to see the smiling yellow ball peaking out at me. Seems it was a promotional item from one of the banks we deal with, and someone put it in the Slinky that morning. I immediately decided that the combination would make an interesting picture, so I took them home"

Boing!

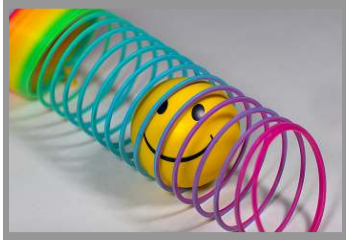
Sunshine

Peek-a-boo

Smile

Bad hair day

You over there ?



I'm innocent, I tell Ya !

Cruisin'

Hey! I'm down here !

Please email your comments and suggestions to magazine@pbase.com

PHOTOSHOPOGRAPHY: Realizing Your Vision

Pam Recek has been a member of Digital Photography Review's Retouching forum for over four years. She has a lifelong passion for photography. Her father gave her his old 35mm camera when she was in high school and she hasn't been without an SLR since. She had her own traditional darkroom but finding the time to work in it uninterrupted was always difficult. The digital darkroom has rekindled her interest in processing and the members of the Retouching forum have helped her make the transition from analog to digital. One day she hopes to turn her passion into a profession.

Realizing your vision using the digital darkroom

Many of us look at the images we've downloaded from our cameras and feel that what we've captured doesn't possess the impact of the scene as we experienced it. By using the tools available to us in the digital darkroom, we can process our images in ways that convey those emotions. We can realize our vision.

I'm going to show you some of my favorite and most requested techniques - tweaking colors, burning and dodging, channel blending and adding textures. These techniques can be mixed and matched in any combination on your own images. Consider them as building blocks for assembling your own vision.

The following examples assume a basic knowledge of Photoshop tools. This includes understanding adjustment layers, masks, levels, etc. Each numbered instruction corresponds to the layers in the palette. When there is a difference in the shortcuts between Mac and Windows, it will be noted. For example, Mac uses the Command, or Cmd key modifier, while Windows uses the Ctrl key. So, it will be Cmd/Ctrl.

The sample images I've used come from the generous photographers at stock.xchng. I have received permission from them to use their work here. You can also use their images for private use. But the photographers must be notified and credited when using the photos for any public work. While you're there, drop them a note of thanks in the comment box. We all love to get feedback!

A- Polishing colors until they shine

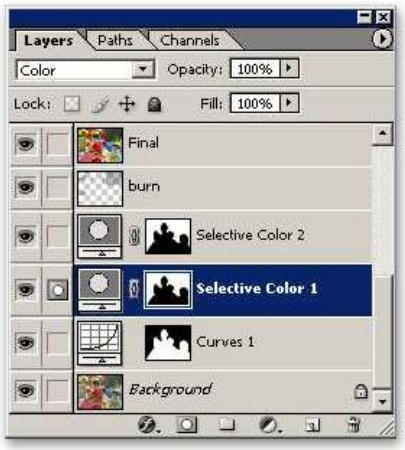
In this example, I'll show you how to alter color in your images using Selective color adjustment layers. Punch them up. Make them cleaner. We'll use this great shot taken by photographer Seven Bates, http://www.sevenbates.com/

He's captured a wonderful moment and the primary colors tie it all together perfectly. The backlighting is superb and I really like how the triangle formed by the kids comes to an apex under the red arch of the swing. The decisive moment captured. Bright, sunny and colorful. Let's polish up those colors and bring the kids forward.

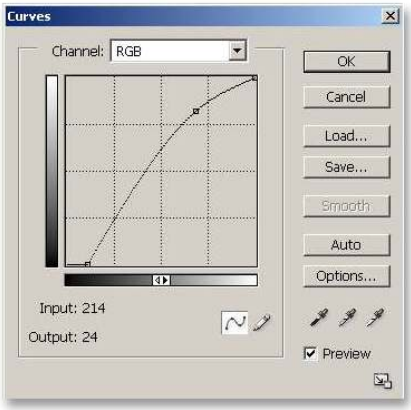
Download the "Park kids 5" image here and follow along with me. But feel free at any time to veer off and follow your own unique vision. Signing up with stock.xchng is free:
http://www.sxc.hu/browse.phtml?f=view&id=518666

The original image:

Here's what the palette will look like when we've finished:



1 - We'll start by opening a curves adjustment layer to boost the contrast a little and lighten up the kid's faces. Here is the curves adjustment I used. This curve will brighten up the image, particularly the mid-upper tones and increase mid tone contrast while keeping shadows dark.



TRIPLE WHAMMY !

Featured in this article:

>> Polishing colors until they shine

>> Creating strong dramatic portraits

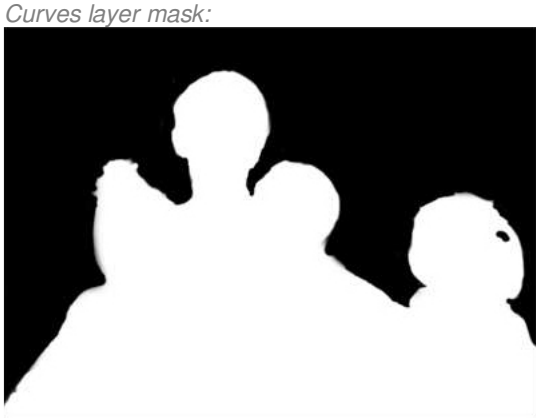
>> Using Textures

"Many of us look at the images we've downloaded from our cameras and feel that what we've captured doesn't possess the impact of the scene as we experienced it. By using the tools available to us in the digital darkroom, we can process our images in ways that convey those emotions. We can realize our vision"

I also want to separate the kids from the background, so I'll use a mask. It will prevent the curves adjustment from affecting the background and brightening it as well. We'll create the mask using the easiest of the masking techniques, painting on the layer mask itself. Click on the curves layer mask to activate it. Now take a 100% opacity black brush and start painting over the background. Whatever you paint black will be hidden from the effects of the curves setting. Anything white, which is the children in this case, will be exposed to the curves settings. This will lighten the children up and leave the background unaffected.

Try to use smaller, harder brushes when you are close to the edge of the children's silhouette. The finished mask will look something like this:

Curves layer mask:



After the curves adjustment, using the finished mask:

The kids look good now, but the background looks a little washed out and I want the colors to be bright and clean. The first thing I'll do is adjust the color using selective color. We're going to use the mask we created in the curves adjustment. Cmd/Ctrl+click on the layer mask of Curves layer 1. This will load the mask as a selection. Now open a Selective color adjustment layer and set the blend mode to "Color". Color mode will allow us to make changes to the color while having little or no effect on the underlying brightness, or luminosity of the image.

Selective color allows you to address 6 different colors separately, plus white, gray and black from the drop down menu. In the selective color dialog box, there are 4 sliders, each marked Cyan, Magenta, Yellow and Black. Here, you can finely tune hue. And, using the black slider within each color, adjust the luminance or brightness of that color. So, if we want our Yellows to be greenish, we'll add some cyan, blue or green. If we want them darker, we'll add some black.

The default position of the sliders is at 0. If you move the slider to the right, you will increase the amount of that particular color. Move it left and you decrease the amount of that color. So, if we choose Yellow in the drop down box, then move the Yellow slider to the right, we are increasing the amount of Yellow. Move it left and we decrease the amount of yellow. If we move the cyan slider to the right, it will increase the amount of cyan that's within Yellow, if there is any. Move the cyan slider to the left to decrease the cyan in Yellow.

The way I use Selective Color with any image is this:

First I chose a color from the drop down list, for example, Cyan.

Then I wiggle the Black slider back and forth while looking at the image to see if it has an effect on the color. If it does, then that color, (in this example, it's Cyan), will be affected by any changes I make. If it doesn't, or the change is extremely small, it means there is little, if any of that color within the image. So any adjustments made will have little or no effect.

Until you get used to using Selective Color adjustment layers, the best course of action is to experiment. Choose a color from the drop down list then start moving sliders until you see something you like.

Experiment also with the Method settings of Relative and Absolute at the bottom of the palette. For this image, I used the default setting of "Relative". Relative means any changes you make to a color will be added as a percentage of where it began. For example, if the cyan in the image was 50%, moving the cyan slider to 10% makes the total cyan in the image now equal 55% (10% of 50%=5%). With Absolute turned on, any changes to color will be added on top of what the image contains. So, if the image contains 50% cyan and we move the cyan slider to 10%, the image will now contain 60% cyan. Experiment with both settings to see which works best on your image.

"Selective color allows you to address 6 different colors separately, plus white, gray and black from the drop down menu. In the selective color dialog box, there are 4 sliders, each marked Cyan, Magenta, Yellow and Black. Here, you can finely tune hue. And, using the black slider within each color, adjust the luminance or brightness of that color. So, if we want our Yellows to be greenish, we'll add some cyan, blue or green. If we want them darker, we'll add some black"

Returning to our image, let's adjust reds first.

2 - We want clean bright colors. To get a purer, cleaner color, decrease it's opposite. For example, red's opposite is cyan. To get a purer red, decrease cyan. With that in mind, here are the numbers I used for Selective color layer 1, which is set to color mode.

The colors listed along the left side are the drop down list color choices, that is, the colors you will be adjusting. The colors listed along the top of the chart are the colors shown next to the sliders. Enter the numbers shown into the box next to the slider of each color. For example, on the first line, we'll pull down the drop down box and chose Red. In the box next to the Cyan slider, we'll type -54. In the Black slider box, + 26, and so on.

Selective color layer 1 – color mode

	Cyan	Magenta	Yellow	Black
Reds	-54	0	0	+26
Yellow	0	0	+51	+24
Greens	0	0	0	0
Cyan	0	0	0	0
Blue	+48	0	-16	0
Magenta	0	0	0	0
Whites	0	0	0	0
Neutrals	0	0	0	0
Blacks	0	0	0	0

3 - Now we'll add a second selective color layer, this time in Normal mode. Using it in this mode means both color and luminosity will be affected, which is the effect I want in this image:

Selective color layer 2 – normal mode

	Cyan	Magenta	Yellow	Black
Reds	-30	0	0	+23
Yellow	0	0	+48	+17
Greens	+16	-32	0	+6
Cyan	0	0	0	0
Blue	+28	0	-59	0
Magenta	0	0	0	0
Whites	0	0	0	0
Neutrals	0	0	0	0
Blacks	0	0	0	0

After the color adjustments:

4 - Let's burn in the background a bit as a final touch to set off the kids a little more. Open a new empty layer and set the blend mode to Soft Light. With a black brush at 50% opacity, brush over the greenery in the background. Don't brush over the playground equipment. We want to keep that bright and clean.
That's all there is to it. Here's the final image, bright and shiny:

The final image:

The original image:

B - Creating strong dramatic portraits

I'm often asked how I create the "dark portraits" in my Transformations gallery. Here is an abbreviated tutorial. I use the term abbreviated in the sense that I do much more tweaking and fine tuning than there is space to describe. But what I've outlined below is the backbone of my technique. This also works well with landscapes, urban scenes…just about anything.

Here we have a great character shot that is perfect for this treatment. It has great detail, no blown highlights, no blocked shadows and the lighting doesn't have too much contrast nor is it completely flat. The technique we'll use for this tends to build contrast quickly. One of the keys to success is keeping the contrast under control throughout the process. Don't let it get out of hand or you'll end up with chunky shadows.

This image is by Bobby Krumov and Nick Vasilkovski, aka "Ultra team" at stock.xchng. We're just going to give it some contrast, tweak the colors and replace the background. Simple!

Download the image, "An old man" from here and follow along:

http://www.sxc.hu/browse.phtml?f=view&id=655108

"I'm often asked how I create the 'dark portraits' in my Transformations gallery. Here is an abbreviated tutorial. I use the term abbreviated in the sense that I do much more tweaking and fine tuning than there is space to describe. But what I've outlined below is the backbone of my technique. This also works well with landscapes, urban scenes…just about anything"

The original image:

Here's how the layers palette will look after we finish:

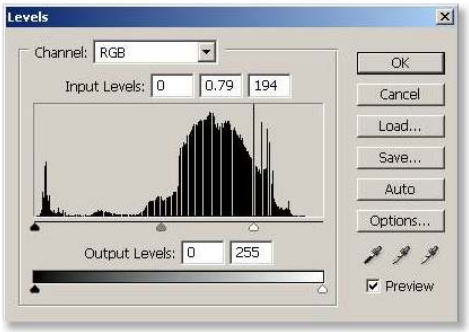
First, we're going to add a slight bit of contrast to start:

1 - Duplicate the background layer. Set the blending mode to soft light and reduce opacity to 50%.

2 - Next, we'll increase the contrast a little more strongly while using a channel mask:

- Hit Cmd/Ctrl + 3 to load the blue channel as a selection.

- Open a levels adjustment layer. The blue channel mask should be attached. Here are the levels settings I used:



Here is what it looks like after the levels adjustment:

3 - Hit Cmd/Ctrl + Shift + Alt + N + E to place a merged copy of all work performed up to this point on top of the stack.

Now we'll harvest the blue channel from this layer and use it to complete the contrast shift for this image. I chose the blue channel because it shows the most "character". That is, wrinkles, skin color differences, scars…all the things that keep the face from looking like a plastic mannequin are emphasized in the blue channel.

Feel free to experiment with other channels. The red channel usually has the most contrast and is the brightest. This is good for reducing skin imperfections and can be a great start to a "glamour" look. The green channel usually has the most detail and a heavy percentage of the green channel can be the basis for a good b+w channel mixer conversion.

4 - Go to the channels palette and click on the blue channel. Hit Cmd/Ctrl + A to select all, then Cmd/Ctrl + C to copy. Return to the layers palette, open a new layer, then hit Cmd/Ctrl + V to paste the blue channel into the new layer.

5 - Make another copy of the background layer by clicking and dragging it down to the "Create a new layer" icon at the bottom of the layers palette. Drag this new layer to the top of the stack. It should now be above the blue channel layer. Set the background copy blend mode to "Color". We now have the color of the original combined with the luminosity of our new blue channel. If you'd like, at this point, you could lower the opacity of the color layer to get a more de-saturated look.

After blending in the blue channel layer:

"Now we'll harvest the blue channel from this layer and use it to complete the contrast shift for this image. I chose the blue channel because it shows the most 'character'. That is, wrinkles, skin color differences, scars…all the things that keep the face from looking like a plastic mannequin are emphasized in the blue channel"

"Feel free to experiment with other channels. The red channel usually has the most contrast and is the brightest. This is good for reducing skin imperfections and can be a great start to a "glamour" look. The green channel usually has the most detail and a heavy percentage of the green channel can be the basis for a good b+w channel mixer conversion"

All that's left now is to tweak the colors.

There are many ways of altering color available in PS. My favorites are selective color, color balance and curves. I find that using successive layers of coloring gives me a better result than trying to color the image all in one layer. This way, the colors interact with each other, much like using successive layers of paint on a watercolor. This is the reason you'll see two color balance layers rather than one in this image.

6 - We'll start with the color tool used in the first example, selective color. Open a selective color adjustment layer and play with the sliders until you get something you like. Photoshop is all about experimenting and trying out ideas. We'll be adjusting only the Reds and Whites. Here are the settings I used:

Selective color 1

	Cyan	Magenta	Yellow	Black
Reds	+32	-16	+41	+36
Whites		-17		

After the selective color adjustment:

7 - The next color layer is color balance. I've left the blending mode of this layer at "Normal". This way, the colors chosen will affect the luminosity. For example, adding blue to the shadows will darken them, adding yellow will lighten. Open a color balance adjustment layer. Here are the settings I chose:

Color balance 1

Shadows	0	+10	0
Midtones	0	0	-6
Highlights	+1	0	-6

After the color balance adjustment:

8 - Here's another color "tool". This will tint the entire image, similar to a watercolor wash. Open a solid color adjustment layer. Set the blending mode to Soft light and use these RGB settings:

R - 131 G - 97 B – 82

After the solid color fill layer:

A solid color adjustment has the advantage of allowing you to interactively see color changes take place on your image. Double-click on the solid color layer and move the slider on the color ramp to change hue. Move the color picker left to right to change saturation and up or down to change brightness. You'll be able to see the changes immediately take place on your image.

9 - Just one last adjustment. His face is a little red. I want to shift it a little towards green/blue. Open another color balance layer and use these settings:

Color balance 2

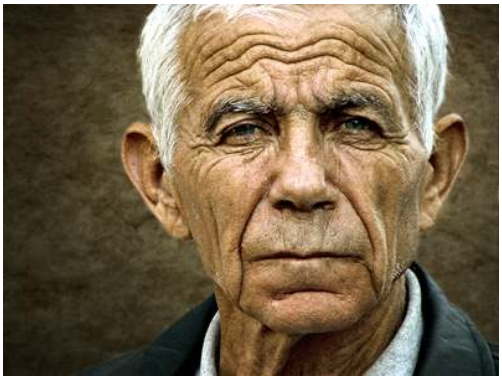
Shadows	0	0	+9
Midtones	0	+13	0
Highlights	0	0	0

That's it! The only thing I would do is perhaps extract the man and replace the background. I won't go into masking since that is beyond the scope of this article. But there are many tutorials available if you'd like to learn. At the end of this article I'll provide some links to masking tutorials online.

Here's the finished version of our old man:

"There are many ways of altering color available in PS. My favorites are selective color, color balance and curves. I find that using successive layers of coloring gives me a better result than trying to color the image all in one layer. This way, the colors interact with each other, much like using successive layers of paint on a watercolor. This is the reason you'll see two color balance layers rather than one in this image"

And here's our old man in his new environment:



The original image:

C - Using textures

Another of my favorite techniques involves the use of textures. Texture effects can range from adding an old feeling to photos, to creating unusual combinations of elements such as portraits that look carved out of wood or stone.

For this image, I'll use 3 textures. Here are the download sites:

Textures 1 and 2 come from Mayang's Free Textures Library, one of the best online resources for free textures:
http://www.mayang.com/textures/

Texture 1:
http://www.mayang.com/textures/perl/preview.pl?image=concrete_170843.JPG

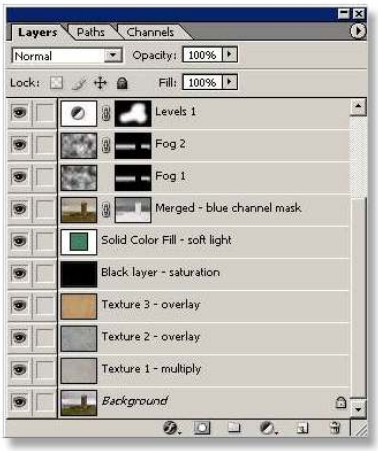
Texture 2:
http://www.mayang.com/textures/perl/preview.pl?image=concrete_170836.JPG

Texture 3 is from another stock.xchng photographer,
http://www.sxc.hu/photo/614708

On this beautifully composed image, Steve Ford Elliott has captured this moody shot of Doonagore Castle in Ireland. Certainly not much needs to be done here, but let's play with some textures and see if we can add to that moody feel.

Download the "Castle and coast" image here:
http://www.sxc.hu/browse.phtml?f=view&id=674688

Remember, these numbers are only guidelines. Adjust to your own taste. Here is the final layers palette:



1 - Add 2 or more texture layers. Experiment with blending modes and opacities to get an effect that's pleasing to your eye. Try multiply, soft light, overlay, hard light and screen to start. On this image, I used 3 textures at these settings:

- Texture 1 was set to Multiply at 50% opacity

- Texture 2 was set to Overlay at 20% opacity

- Texture 3 was set to Overlay at 45% opacity

2 - Open a new layer, fill with black. Set blend mode to Saturation. This strips the color from the image, effectively turning it b+w, leaving only the brightness, or luminosity. I'm going to use this to drain some of the color out of the image while retaining the luminosity. I lowered the opacity of this layer to 45%.

3 - Add a Solid Color Fill adjustment layer. Choose a greenish midtone. I used R-45, G-125, B-99. Set the blending mode to Soft Light and lower opacity to 50%.

4 - Now we're going to bring back a slight bit of color, mostly to the castle and foreground.

Turn off the Solid Color Fill and black layers and click on the Texture 3 layer to activate it. We're going to create a merged layer of all work up to this point.

Hit Cmd/Ctrl+Shift+Alt+N+E. Alternatively, you can open a new layer, then hold down the Opt/Alt key while you click on the right facing arrow top right in the layers palette and go down to "Merge visible". Whichever shortcut is easiest for you.

Click and drag this merged layer to the top of the stack. It should now be above the Solid Color Fill layer. Now we'll add a mask that will direct most of the color to the foreground. Hit Cmd/Ctrl+Alt+3 to load the blue channel. Hit Cmd/Ctrl+Shift+i to invert the selection. With the selection active, click on the "Add layer mask" icon at the bottom of the layers palette. Adjust opacity to taste. I lowered it to 20%.

Next I want to soften the transition between land and sea and lighten up the area behind the castle a bit. Make it look a little foggy.

5 - Open a new layer. Using the Rectangular Marquee tool ("M" key), draw a thin rectangle from side to side that encompasses the area we want to fog. It should look something like this:

The selection for the cloud layers:

Once you have made the selection, right-click while hovering over the selection (or go to Select>Feather), choose Feather, and type 35 into the dialog box. Click on the "Add layer mask" icon to add the mask to the new empty layer. Click on the empty layer to activate it. You should see a paintbrush in the box next to the eyeball. If you see the "washing machine" icon, that's the layer mask icon, which is not what we want. Our next move will involve the empty layer, not the mask itself.

Make sure your foreground/background colors are set to the default black/white by hitting the "D" key. While holding down the Opt/Alt key, go to Filter>Render Clouds. Continue holding the Opt/Alt key until you've released the cursor from "Clouds". This creates clouds that are of a higher contrast than just using Filter>Render>Clouds.

We're looking for a strip of clouds that are lighter rather than darker, particularly in the middle section of the image. If you're not satisfied with your clouds, hit Cmd/Ctrl+F. This shortcut repeats the previous filter used. In this case, it will regenerate a new random cloud formation. Repeat until you have clouds to your liking.

Once you have your clouds set, they may be covering foreground areas that we want clear of clouds. Using a 100% black paintbrush, click on the layer mask and paint over the castle, walls and any other foreground areas that were fogged unintentionally. We want to try to keep the fog behind the castle. Set the blend mode for this layer to Screen.

Before adjusting the opacity of the cloud layers:

6 - Now we'll repeat what we just did on a new layer and re-use the mask we just created. Open a new layer. Cmd/Ctrl+click on the previous layer mask (Fog 1). You should see the marching ants that signify a selection has been made. Click on the new layer you just opened, then on the "Add layer mask" icon. The mask should now be attached to the new layer. Click on the empty layer. Make sure the paintbrush icon is in the box next to the layer, meaning you are now working on the layer, not the mask.

Again, while holding down the Opt/Alt key, go to Filter>Render>Clouds to fill the layer with high contrast clouds. The same requirements apply to this layer. Look for lighter rather than darker clouds, on the whole. Use Cmd/Ctrl+F until you're satisfied. Set this blend mode to "Lighten".

Now, adjust the 2 cloud layers to create a sense of fog. Not too strong, not too weak. As a general guide, I used 60% on the Screen layer and 30% on the Lighten layer.

As a last step, I'd like to lighten up the middle of the image very slightly just to add some depth. Using the lasso tool, draw a loose freehand selection, feather somewhat strongly and then open a levels adjustment layer. Adjust levels to brighten up the area very slightly. If you'd like, you can also Cmd/Ctrl+click on the mask, hit Cmd/Ctrl+i to invert the selection, then open another levels adjustment layer and darken the edges slightly (I did not do that here). My mask looked like this after feathering:

Here's what the final image looks like:

I hope you've enjoyed these tutorials and that you've been inspired to experiment with your own images. Keep playing and creating!

Tips for using textures:

The most important tip is to experiment with blending modes, opacities and combinations of textures.
- If you don't like the color cast the texture imparts, simply desaturate it or use other color adjustment layers to otherwise alter the color.
- If the texture is imparting an unwanted dark splotch, line or other "blemish" on your image, use the healing brush, clone stamp or patch tool directly on the offending area of the texture.
- Don't forget you can flip and/or rotate the texture. Maybe that dark area upper right would look better bottom left. Rotate and flip!
- Try burning and/or dodging directly on the texture for special effects.
- Your texture size doesn't have to match the image. Try using it at sizes larger than your image for different looks. If it's a bit too small, just enlarge it. Any small loss of detail doesn't matter when using textures.
- Try to use large files rather than the very small "tile" textures meant for CGI work.

Masking tutorials:

Vrya's "Masks, Masks, Masks!"
http://vrya.net/ts/photoshop7.php

5 Great Background Masking Techniques
http://www.sitepoint.com/print/masking-techniques-photoshop

Russell Brown's advanced masking video (scroll to the bottom, under PS 7 tips):
http://russellbrown.com/tips_tech.html

Anson Vogt's "Masking a Tree"
http://www.phong.com/tutorials/mask.tree/

Texture sites:

Stock vault
http://www.stockvault.net/gallery/index.php?action=showgal&cat=27

Stockxchng (search for "Textures")
http://www.sxc.hu/index.phtml

TextureKing
http://www.textureking.com/

Texture Warehouse
http://www.texturewarehouse.com/gallery/index.php

Credits:

"Kids park 5" by Seven Bates
http://www.sxc.hu/profile/sevenbates

"An old man" by ultra team
http://www.sxc.hu/profile/ultra_team

"Castle and coast" by Steve Ford Elliott
http://www.sxc.hu/profile/SteveFE

Texture 3 by Christopher Potter, aka, CSP
http://www.sxc.hu/profile/csp

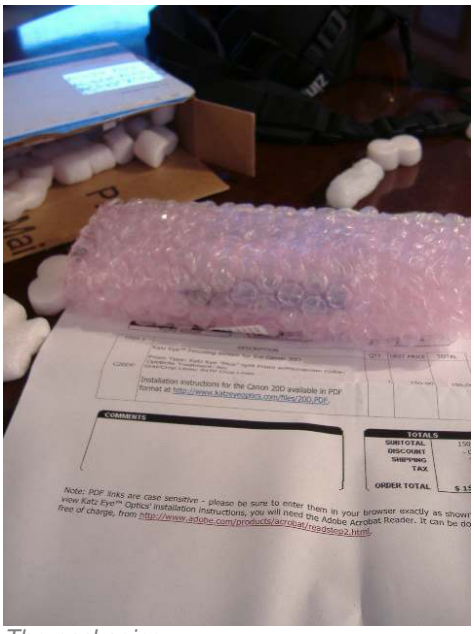
I'd also like to thank Kent Christiansen and Mike Warren of DP Review's Retouching forum for their invaluable help in preparing this article.

GEAR-TALK:Katz Eye Review

Shay Stephens is a professional photographer working in New York. He uses a stylish fusion of photojournalism, formal wedding, and studio photography. His commercial clients range from NASA, Ripley's Believe it or Not, to the Sony Corporation. His work is published in many languages around the globe via textbooks, magazines, television, and an array of digital media.

When I first got my Canon 10D, I was rather disappointed that there was no split prism focusing aid in the viewfinder. I searched Canon's website in vain looking for an upgrade. The situation remained bleak and hopeless for years. I finally picked up a 20D and still nothing was available. Then one fine day in December 2006, I ran across an online post at digitalgrin.com talking about a split prism focus screen available for my camera. But the talk on the thread was "is it any good"? Well, I didn't want to wait for an answer to that one. I decided right then and there that I would order one right away, and I did.

I ordered the Canon 20D split-prism focus screen with 8x10 crop marks from Katz Eye Optics.



The packaging

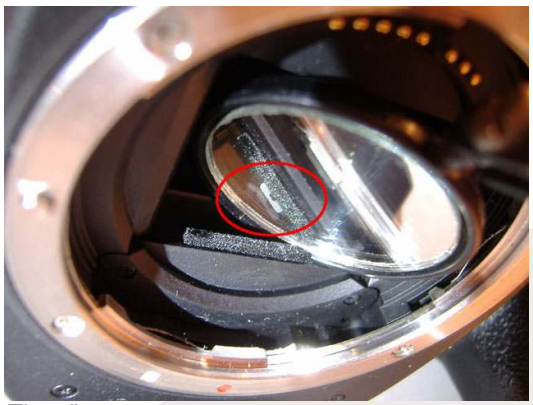
They make screens for many brands of cameras. After a brief wait as it was manufactured and shipped, I finally had the box in my hot little hands. It was just bristling with excitement - or maybe that was just me! Anyway, I didn't want to botch the install so I made sure to download the installation instructions here:

I then sat down and started reading and understanding them. This is important because there are small and delicate parts you will be dealing with that can be damaged if you don't understand and or don't follow the instructions. But don't worry, it's not hard to understand or accomplish, but you do need to know what to do and how to do it, and what to do if things don't go quite to plan (as it did to me).

Read the instructions before you dive in !

When I felt I was ready, I dove in. The tools were simple and few in number. I used a small jewelers screwdriver, but this could be anything sufficiently long and thin to unlatch the retainer spring that holds the focus screen in place. I used a pair of tweezers too, and a blower bulb helped keep the dust under control and the work area clean. The instructions mention using a cover for the mirror. I used at first a lint free lens cleaning cloth. But it proved troublesome and I did the procedure without one. I would go with the instructions on this one. The good readers may have an easier time of it than I did. I also found a small inspection mirror to be invaluable to see the clip that holds the focus screen in place.

The focus screen comes in a small plastic case inside the pink bubble wrap. Keep the screen inside until you are ready to place it in the camera. I can't think of anything worse than accidentally scratching it before you even use it due to some unforeseen accident. On the plus side, you can use the small plastic case to store the old screen after you are done in the chance you ever want to replace the screen with the original.



The clip

CUSTOMER SUPPORT!

In addition to the split prism available on the focus screen, Katz Eyes also offers custom crop line, from rule of thirds to 16x9 wide screen aspect ratios. I decided to have the 8x10 crop marks installed onto my focus screen. That aspect ratio is the one that is the hardest for me to eyeball when I am shooting, so having this feature is a great boon to me.

I decided to see if I could calibrate them to know just how close to perfect they were and if I needed to make any adjustments while shooting. It's good to know where you stand when using any tool, and crop marks are no exception.

So I setup a small experiment that put those lines to the test. I found that the aspect ratio critically came out to about 8x10.25. Close enough for me to rely on if I allow a little bit of room on the inside, but not critically accurate.

And this is where the story gets interesting…

(see next page sidebar)

The operation of replacing the screen is very simple, and you need not force anything, ever. If you are forcing something, you are doing something wrong. The original screen, once the retainer spring is removed, just drops right out and the new one drops right back in again. The trickiest part is getting the retainer spring out. The instructions show you where it is located, but I had to use an inspection mirror to know what I was really looking for. Once I saw the clip with my eye, it was a piece of cake to pull it out according to the instructions.

There is a little metal shim that is supposed to stay in place, but mine fell out (the brass looking part above the old focus screen). The instructions deal with putting it back in and I found no difficulty in doing so. Again this basically just drops in with no force applied. The only problem I had was that I printed the instructions out on a B&W printer. There is a photo that shows how to put the shim back in, and it really should be viewed in color. So I had to take a quick look at the version on the computer, and once I did so, it was all clear to my mind as to what had to be done.

The metal shim

Once the shim was back in place, I went to install the new focus screen itself. Same deal here, just drop the focus screen in in the right spot. No force needs to be applied. The only possible problem you can run across here is putting the screen on upside down. So don't you know, that is exactly what I did hahaha. But this is good, because now I can tell you that if you wind up doing this, you won't be able to get a clear focused image in the viewfinder and the taken photo at the same time. So if your viewfinder is blurry, put the camera back, and take the retainer spring back off, and put the screen in correctly. The correct direction is for the raised prism part of the focus screen to be facing the eyepiece and the smooth side of the focus screen to face the mirror. Once the screen was in place I then put the retainer spring back on. Make sure it is seated in the original position. If you don't snap it back in place fully, the screen will be slightly out of focus. So make sure it is fully seated as per the instructions.

On a difficulty scale of 1 to 10, I give it a 3, so long as you read and understand the instructions before beginning. You are dealing with small-ish and fragile parts, so you need to be gentle and have a semi-steady hand. There is also another guide available which I did not use, but it might help someone by bringing a second view to the procedure, located here

The results were fabulous! It makes manual focus so much simpler (in my case, I could never manually focus before)! What surprised me more was that even my auto-focus is better, not because the auto-focus actually works any better, but now I can see when it is not quite spot on. It is much easier to see when the image is not critically sharp now. So I expect my consistency in achieving focus will go way up. For me, this gem of a tool is going to help take the guess work out of my focusing.

I put the screen to the test last week when I took it to a wedding I photographed. And I am happy to report that I experienced no difficulties with it in operation. Some may wonder if the added detail of the split prism and micro prism ring are distracting. I didn't notice any impediment, and if anything, I believe it worked to give me better results because it seemed easier and faster to determine when I had adequate focus. Without the split prism focus screen, it was always guesswork

I don't use the camera metering, so can't really speak to any changes the screen may or may not make in regard to camera metering. And while I was using the camera at the wedding, I did not notice any perceptible dimming of the eyepiece either.

The cameras focus points still light up and are visible just like they normally would with the stock focus screen, the focus points are controlled separately from the focus screen, so there is no change there.

I don't find the screens new visual details distracting, and when I was first testing it, I forgot I had the 8x10 crop marks and had to go back and try again to specifically notice and use them. The split prism area extends past the center focus point, so you can get a clear unobstructed area if you need one. The micro-prism ring area scintillates when out of focus, and I find it a wonderful combo with the split prism.

I was very pleased to be involved in this, as well as being happy with the product, and when it comes time to order a second screen, I will be reordering from Katz Eyes for sure. Alongside my light meter, and my PocketWizards, this was one of the best purchases I have made for the camera. If you grew up with split prism focus screens and miss them, worry no more. If you have never experienced this incredible photographers aid, you owe it to yourself to get this tool.

(..CONTD)

CUSTOMER SUPPORT!

I was in contact with Katz Eyes, and after some emails and telephone calls, we did some additional testing, and it was discovered that Canon was possibly reporting specs on their sensor that did not critically match the active sensor area.

Katz Eyes was very surprised at this, because they go to great lengths to ensure the etched accuracy of their crop marks to within some crazy sounding (to me) tolerances. Once it was decided that the discrepancy was real, there was some (looking back) rather humorous "I can't believe it" statements. But to their great credit, they are going to re-engineer the crop marks for the 20D based on this new data.

I don't know of too many companies that are willing to strive for that kind of accuracy. ***But Katz Eyes is that kind of company.***

Please email your comments and suggestions to magazine@pbase.com

CULTURE CAULDRON: Israel

Abba started photographing at the young age of fourteen. His first camera was a Minox 16mm spy camera. He moved up to 35mm (a Russian Zorki) and settled on a Nikon FTN which he used for 35 years. His photography bloomed when he was at art school where he studied Graphic design and Photography and spent hours in the darkroom mixing developers and trying out different papers. Most of his professional life was spent as a Graphic designer with little emphasis on photography. In 2003 he bought a Nikon Coolpix 5000 after his Nikon FTN died. He moved to a Nikon D70 and now uses a Nikon D200 with a Nikon 18-200mm VR lens and a 50mm 1.8 lens. Two of his sons, Malachi and Anael seem to be following in their father's footsteps. When asked what he likes to photograph, Abba prefers to say what he doesn't like to photograph: "No glorious sunsets, no animals, no flowers, no intrinsically beautiful things. I am always looking at the seemingly boring, backyards, graffiti, cityscapes, urban clutter, and am constantly trying to find beauty in the confusion of our visual world". Abba now teaches photography and computer graphics at colleges and schools. He also gives regular photography workshops. Abba's Alphabet portfolio was recently incorporated in the photography syllabus as part of the UK A-level and National Diploma in Photography.

Israel

I have been living in Israel for thirty nine years, emigrating from England when I was eighteen years old; studied at a Talmudic academy for two years and then continued my education at the Bezalel Academy of Art as a Graphic Design undergraduate student studying there for four years, plus an additional graduate year in Photography.

I met and married Liliana (who emigrated from Italy), in 1972 and we have six children (three married girls and three bachelor boys) and eight grandchildren. We live in Efrat, a small township ten kilometers south of Jerusalem.

Israel has a Love/Hate relationship with the rest of the world – you either love us or you hate us.

A native born Israeli is known in local slang as a "Sabra" which is the fruit of a very large and ugly desert cactus, growing as high as a man, with very prickly, fleshy leaves and very prickly fruit. The inside of the fruit however is delicious, very tasty and sweet.
The Sabra fruit epitomizes the average Israeli – a tad aggressive and a bit loud and pushy on the outside but very good natured and charming once you peel off the layers.

`*Orthodox Jewish boys*

Israel is the world's 100th smallest country, 27,000, km^2 (the State of New Jersey is bigger than us), with a population of just under 7,000,000 (less than 1/1000th of the world's population). However everything that happens here is magnified a zillion times through the eyes of the rest of the world. When Israel sneezes the whole world catches a cold.

Geography

Israel is long skinny and narrow in shape, a mere nine hour drive from top to bottom, the climate ranges from sunny hot Eilat, 365 days of the year, to the snowy mountainous Hermon on the northernmost border. There are 273 kilometers of Mediterranean coastline, the Red sea is in the furthest south, the sea of Galilee in the north, and in the East, the Dead Sea, the lowest place on earth (-418m) and famous for it's medicinal mud and recuperative salty waters.
The main cities of Israel are Jerusalem, the religious centre, Tel Aviv, the cultural centre, Haifa and Beersheba, the capital of the Negev. The country is divided into districts, cities, small townships and urban and local municipal councils and as well as cooperative settlements and kibbutzim.

Jerusalem at night

Religion

Israel's capital city, Jerusalem, is also the religious capital of the world, Holy to the three great religions, Judaism, Islam and Christianity. The Temple Mount is Judaism's Holiest place; (see my Temple Mount Gallery) and also Islam's third Holiest place, and a Holy city to Christianity. Hebron, which is 60 kilometres south of Jerusalem is the second holiest Jewish shrine; the site of the Tomb of the Patriarchs. The structure built on top of the tombs is the oldest continually inhabited building in the world, over two thousand years old. There are thousands of religious sites throughout Israel and pilgrims from all over the world visit these sites in their millions.

ABBA ON ISRAEL:

"Israel has a Love/Hate relationship with the rest of the world – you either love us or you hate us"

Feast of abernacles

*"A native born Israeli is known in local slang as a 'Sabra' which is the fruit of a very large and ugly desert cactus, growing as high as a man, with very prickly, fleshy leaves and very prickly fruit. The inside of the fruit however is delicious, very tasty and sweet.
The Sabra fruit epitomizes the average Israeli – a tad aggressive and a bit loud and pushy on the outside but very good natured and charming once you peel off the layers"*

Population

Israel is the only country in the world with a unique "Law of Return" that guarantees every Jew in the world the right to automatic citizenship upon immigrating to Israel.

Israel's population consists of 77% Jews, and 23% that make up sizable minorities of Moslems (Arab, Bedouin, Druze, Bahai, Circassians), and Christians (Greek Catholic, Greek orthodox, Roman Catholics, Protestant, Anglican, and Armenian).

Israel has three official languages, Hebrew, Arabic and English, though you can hear every language on earth spoken in the streets: English, Russian, French, German, Amharic, Yiddish, Spanish, every Scandinavian language, Italian, Pilipino, and Farsi. Any tourist from anywhere in the world can make him/herself understood in Israel.

Ethiopian immigrants

Most of Israel's' population lives north of the Negev desert which covers about 50% of Israel's land space. This desert, although scarcely populated, is a world leader in desert agriculture, producing vegetable crops as well as bug free and organic crops.
Most Israeli families have cars, but its bus companies ply the country from north to south carrying over two million passengers every day. The main bus company, Egged, is the world's largest bus cooperative, and the second largest bus company in the world (after London transport) with over three thousand busses and a traveler can travel very comfortably all over the country by public transport.

The average Israeli family has at least two children, and families with six, eight, twelve and more are common, both parents usually work and children are educated from three months old in crèches, day care centres, kindergartens, schools, high schools, dormitories, religious high schools, seminaries, colleges, adult education centres and universities

A father's blessing in Jewish wedding

Sport

Israel's national sports are basketball and football. Although Israelis would like to think that their football teams are the best in the world, they are not bad and on par with good European teams. Israel's basketball teams are however amongst the best in the world, Maccabi Tel Aviv being one of the best. Swimming and Tennis are very popular too and Israeli sports men and women are world class in weight lifting, sailing, and shooting. Every Israeli town and settlement has its local sport and cultural centre funded in most part by Israel's National Lottery.

Culture

Theatres, museums, concert halls, and cinemas abound everywhere, although Israelis, catching up with the western world, spend a lot of leisure time strolling the Malls.
Tourism is one of Israel's major industries with millions of visitors coming per year.

Israel and Photography

Israeli Photographer Gill Azouri is presently #1 in the All Time favorite galleries of PBase (yours truly was once #3 for two weeks).

Israel's contribution to the world of photography is that Leaf digital camera backs are developed and manufactured in Herzlia, near Tel Aviv. Leaf is a Kodak company.

Food

Israelis like to eat. Food plays an important part in Israeli life. Restaurants of all types abound and you can find nearly every type of food to eat: traditional Jewish of course, as well as Russian, European, Oriental, Persian, Turkish, French, German, Italian, Ethiopian, and Greek. American fast food eating emporiums can be found everywhere. National foods are Felafel, made from fried chic pea paste (very tasty) and Shawarma, (even tastier) made from turkey breast. They taste better eating standing up and even better whilst walking in the street. What you won't find in Israel is food that moves on your plate.

"Israel is the only country in the world with a unique "Law of Return" that guarantees every Jew in the world the right to automatic citizenship upon immigrating to Israel"

Israeli women

"Most of Israel's population lives north of the Negev desert which covers about 50% of Israel's land space. This desert, although scarcely populated, is a world leader in desert agriculture, producing vegetable crops as well as bug free and organic crops"

Holy Fruit

Military

Israel has compulsory military conscription for both boys and girls and at age eighteen boys are drafted for three and a half years and girls for two years. Both boys and girls serve in combat units, and there is great competition to get to serve in elite combat units. Unfortunately Israel has been military threatened since its independence in 1948, notwithstanding the so called peace process which has yet to lead to true peace.

Religious life in Israel

In the politically correct environment of the world we live in today, the very mention of religion in public life stirs up controversy and sends people to the barricades. In Israel it is an all-encompassing part of everyday life. Whether one is Jewish, Moslem, Christian, or even agnostic or non denominational, religion plays a part in our lives from the moment one is born.

Ritual Life

Circumcision

Jewish males are circumcised on the eighth day after birth. This is a very joyous ceremony and very family oriented. The ceremony is performed by a Mohel who is specially trained and state Licensed. There is usually a festive meal for all the participants and invited guests. The origin of circumcision, - "Brit" in Hebrew, is the Biblical commandment – "…every male among you shall be circumcised." (Genesis 17:6,8,10). Nearly every Jewish male is circumcised, transcending the bounds of religious observance. The custom is so popular that baby Jewish girls, not to be outdone, very often have a less formal "Brita", (no circumcision involved) which usually takes the form of a festive meal.
Most Moslem men are also circumcised.

Bar/Bat Mitzvah

Jewish girls reaching the age of twelve have a "Bat Mitzvah". Jewish boys reaching the age of thirteen have a "Bar Mitzvah". Both these ceremonies are religious in nature and mark the age of transition from childhood to adulthood. The ceremonies are usually held in a synagogue with the boys publicly reading a portion of the "torah", and the girls giving a religious discourse. Jewish boys who are religiously observant start the daily practice of putting on Phylacteries, small leather containers which contain biblical verses written on Parchment. Festive get togethers are held, ranging from humble family gatherings at home to major bashes in catering halls or hotels for hundreds of guests. Gifts are also given to the Bar and Bat Mitzvah celebrants.

Jerusalem souvenirs

Weddings

The majority of Israeli couples are married by state licensed Rabbis in religious ceremonies, under a festive canopy - a "Chupa", and always accompanied by a festive meal. Blessings are recited over wine and the bride is given a "Ketuba", marriage contract, by the groom.

Burials

Burials are paid for by the state and conducted in a religious ceremony. All burial arrangements are handled by private burial societies. The Jewish custom is to bury the deceased as quickly as possible and great reverence and respect is paid to the departed. The body is ritually washed and cleansed and forgiveness is asked from the deceased by all those involved in the burial. After the burial the immediate blood relatives and spouses observe seven days of ritual mourning, sitting on low stools and being comforted by visitors.

The Jewish Home

Jewish households have a "Mezuzzah" affixed to the door lintels of their rooms. This is a small decorative box containing various Biblical verses written on parchment emphasizing the Oneness of God. Although a purely religious symbol, 98% of Israeli households have them.

Kosher and Halal

Kosher food involves the separation of dairy and meat foods, the prohibition of eating certain animals, for instance no pork, rabbit, or some sea food, (Giraffes are Kosher) and the ritual slaughter of animals. Moslems eat Halal food, basically no pork and no alcohol in the food.

Dried garlic

"Israel has compulsory military conscription for both boys and girls and at age eighteen boys are drafted for three and a half years and girls for two years. Both boys and girls serve in combat units, and there is great competition to get to serve in elite combat units. Unfortunately Israel has been military threatened since its independence in 1948, notwithstanding the so called peace process which has yet to lead to true peace"

Holy land souvenirs

Tel Aviv's Carmel market

Festivals

Most festivals are national in character, the level of practice and observance depending on the individual

Religious festivals are a national event and are celebrated with great fervor.

The Jewish New Year is celebrated on "Rosh Hashana" and since the Jewish year is based on lunar calculations the timing tends to shift around a bit in relation to the rest of the world and it usually falls around September/October. The New Year is followed by Yom Kippur, the solemnest day in the Israeli calendar and the whole country grinds to a standstill. No radio, TV, all ports are closed, no public transport, all stores, offices and public places are closed for 24 hours. Only essential emergency services are on standby.
This followed by "Sukkot", the Feast of Tabernacles, and religious Jews build small booths that are open to the sky and for seven days all meals are taken in them. This festival is in remembrance of the time that the Jews lived like nomads in the desert after the exodus from Egypt (13th century BC). Palm branches and the Etrog, a citrus fruit, are also used in religious services. The seventh day of Sukkot is "Simchat Torah" when the annual cycle of reading the Torah is completed and begun anew. A festival parade of Torah scrolls amidst singing and dancing are held in synagogues and in the streets, and typically accompanied by a moderate consumption of alcohol.

Wailing wall in Jerusalem

The next festival is "Chanuka", celebrated around December, the festival of lights, celebrating the Macabean's victory over the Greeks (166 BC).
Next down the line is "Purim", (around March) commemorating the Divine deliverance of the Jews during the reign of the Persian king Ahasuerus (5th century BC). This is a day of public merriment and dressing up and parties.
Following a month later is the festival of Passover, commemorating the Exodus from Egypt and the parting of the Red Sea allowing the Jewish people to escape the Egyptian army. For seven days no leavened products are sold in the stores, no bread, no pizza, no falafel etc. The traditional food of Passover is Matza.

Passover is followed seven weeks later by "Shavuot" the festival commemorating the giving of the Torah to the Jewish people at Mt Sinai.

Moslems observe the month long fast of Ramadan. Established in the year 638 it is considered the most venerated, blessed and spiritually-beneficial month of the Islamic year. Prayers, fasting, charity, and self-accountability are especially stressed at this time. Daily fasting is proscribed for all able, adult Muslims during the whole month of Ramadan, from sunrise to sunset.
The holiday of Eid ul-Fitr marks the end of the fasting period of Ramadan. Eid ul-Fitr means the Festival of Breaking the Fast, food is donated to the poor; everyone has communal prayers which are held in the early morning, followed by feasting and visiting relatives and friends.

Tel Aviv street scene

Old city market

"In the politically correct environment of the world we live in today, the very mention of religion in public life stirs up controversy and sends people to the barricades. In Israel it is an all-encompassing part of everyday life. Whether one is Jewish, Moslem, Christian, or even agnostic or non denominational, religion plays a part in our lives from the moment one is born"

Old city, Jerusalem

Please email your comments and suggestions to magazine@pbase.com

LEARNING:Something Smokin'!

Csaba Mészáros was born in Western Hungary. His interest in nature photography blossomed during his studies at the University of Budapest. Together with friends, he traveled across Eastern Europe with manual Praktica cameras and enjoyed their adventures. Following that, his interest for photography was pushed to the background for about fifteen years while he received a PhD in applied mathematics, a field in which he is a researcher today. He started photography again about two years ago when he bought a DSLR. His interest now covers a wider spectrum including abstract, nature, macro, people and street photography. He enjoys participating in the challenges held at Dpreview/PBase a lot very and believes they are very good opportunities for amateur photographers to learn and try out new things.

SMOKIN' !

"Smoke Photography or Smoke Art is a popular approach to create abstract photographs. It requires a relatively quick and easy setup and results in pictures with gentle lines, rich structures and variegated forms. It is a lot of fun for photographers who love abstract pictures and are not afraid of some post processing. This article presents a rough guide on achieving eye-catching smoke photographs. The interested reader may find more comprehensive resources to smoke art in electronic and printed literature elsewhere on the Internet."

Introduction

"Smoke Photography" or "Smoke Art" is a popular approach to create abstract photographs. It requires a relatively quick and easy setup and results in pictures with gentle lines, rich structures and variegated forms. It is a lot of fun for photographers who love abstract pictures and are not afraid of some post processing. This article presents a rough guide on achieving eye-catching smoke photographs. The interested reader may find more comprehensive resources to smoke art in electronic and printed literature elsewhere on the Internet.

The ingredients

The most important ingredient, is, of course, the smoke itself. The Indian "incense sticks" are perfect solutions for a non-smoker, like me. Incense sticks are cheap and widely available.

They generate smoke with constant flow and last quite long. Usually, you will not need more than one at a time. And besides the smoke photographs, you will have also a by-product: pleasant, relaxing fragrance! These sticks come with different fragrances – you can buy any pack you like.

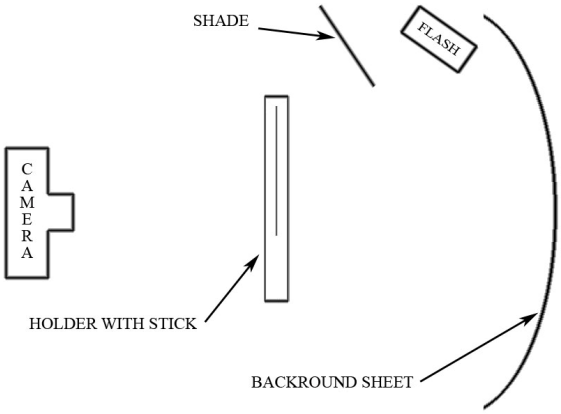
Follow the instructions which are printed on the pack and handle them with care. Incense sticks are usually harmless, but after all, they are burning and it may be possible that you burn something. So I'd suggest not to leave them 'unattended'.

Next, you need a large back drop for the background. Photo cartons or black cloth is fine. I use black crepe paper which is cheap, absorbs light very well and is available in large sizes. In addition, another smaller black sheet is needed to shade direct light from the light source to the camera.

Finally, you would also need an external flashgun and a sturdy tripod. Cable release is optional but highly recommended. I use a camera with a short tele-lens (135mm equivalent on full frame) which gives a comfortable working distance from the object and keeps the size of the background relatively small. The setup fits well on a 120cm x 60cm table.

The incense stick holder is placed in the middle, the background sheet to the back and the flashgun behind the stick on the left side. You need a flash cable between the camera and flashgun, or you can use the external flash in wireless mode as well. In the latter case you have to prevent visible light from the pop-up flash to lighten the smoke from front. A self-made cover on the pop-up flash with unexposed slide film does this job fine.

Place an incense stick into the holder. Set the camera to manual focus, aperture priority and focus it manually. Now you can light the stick. You should blow out the flame immediately and the remaining ember will produce the smoke while it burns. Please read the instructions that come with your incense sticks.



Photographing the smoke

The best way is to set the flashgun to manual power and take a few test shots to select the correct aperture on the camera. After the focus and exposure is set, you can concentrate on the smoke and shoot a picture if something interesting develops. In a turbulence-free environment the smoke emanates as a more or less straight column which is not very interesting. However, most conditions induce some natural air-turbulence which combined with some forced movement can produce very interesting shapes.

Interesting abstract creations can be achieved by making periodic waves in the air which become visible through the incense smoke. Random air turbulences, for example the ones created by

body movements nearby, may create more interesting smoke formations.

Post processing

First, select one of the shots in which you see the most potential. In my case the selected picture (see above) looks almost like a lady from the side. You can easily identify the body and the face. Actually, the face needs retouching: some smoke tufts are unwanted and those should be removed. First I traced the profile and made a selection that includes the unwanted smoke tufts to the right.

Then I sampled the backround color and painted over the selection, effectively removing them.

The same process was performed for the 'hair' of the lady. Finally, some empty space was added at the top of the head for added perspective (may require some cloning here if your original is cropped)

Head before

Head after

Interestingly, you would also notice that the lady has an enlarged stomach. A new possibility! After finishing the head I decided to make the belly larger . You got it - the idea was to clone in a smoke baby in the belly and complete a telling story.

Enlarging the belly was quite simple, I made a rectangular selection of the full picture and applied "Warp" transformations in the middle section. I then made the "embryo" from another smoke shot. In addition, I "circle-*ized*" it by the technique descried in the article "How to create amazing circles".

The baby then was applied as a new layer, transformed to fit and then blended in "lighten" mode to the lady.

The final steps were background cleaning (spotting, cleaning stray tufts etc.) and adjusting contrast and brightness. The easiest way to select the background is using the magic wand. This selection may be tuned further if necessary to include all spots in the background we may have. I decreased the brightness of this selection to make it darker.

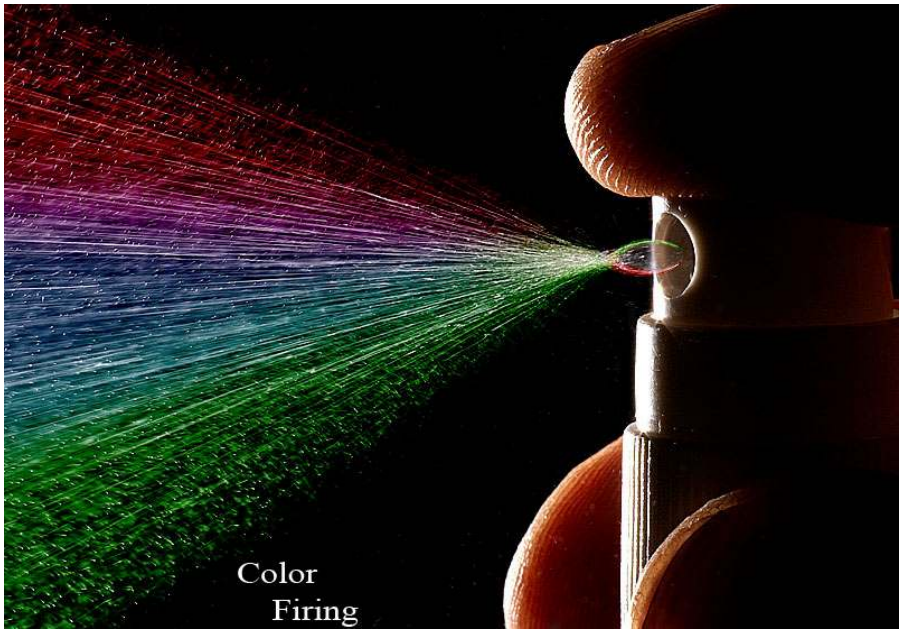
I then duplicated the picture as a new layer in overlay mode and set the opacity of it to about 35%. This increases the contrast and makes the final form of the picture: "Mom and baby". Similar techniques were used for the picture "Intimacy". Two shots, forming a male and female body were processed and linked together in one picture.

"The best way is to set the flashgun to manual power and take a few test shots to select the correct aperture on the camera. After the focus and exposure is set, you can concentrate on the smoke and shoot a picture if something interesting develops. In a turbulence-free environment the smoke emanates as a more or less straight column which is not very interesting. However, most conditions induce some natural air-turbulence with combined with some forced movement can produce very interesting shapes"

Other ideas and similar objects

You can break a single column of smoke by placing objects in its way. The picture “Apparition” is one example. A dried plant was placed in the way of the smoke column and the tiny branches broke the smoke apart. In post processing, besides the usual steps described above, smoke column below the plant was cloned out which gave the impression that the smoke comes from the dried plant itself.

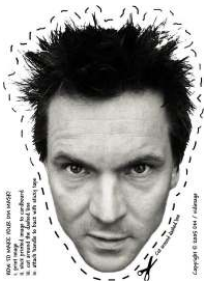
You can capture vapor and spray in a similar setup. The picture “Color Firing” was captured and then colored in post processing by creating a new layer with color gradient and blended in color burn mode. Creating colored layers and blending them as color burn or multiply is an efficient coloring method for smoke pictures too. I hope you will find this guide helpful and smoke photography enjoyable.



“You can break a single column of smoke by placing objects in its way. The picture ‘Apparition’ is one example. A dried plant was placed in the way of the smoke column and the tiny branches broke the smoke apart. In post processing, besides the usual steps described above, smoke column below the plant was cloned out which gave the impression that the smoke comes from the dried plant itself”

Please email your comments and suggestions to magazine@pbase.com

PAD-CORNER: What's up, Doc ?



The PBase PAD community has grown by leaps and bounds over the years. In this article, David Mingay chimes in with his views on what the PAD is, how it motivates the PAD*ers* and a look at how it evolved over the years. This is the first in a two part article. In the second part, Lee Rudd comments on the PAD theme challeges.

David Mingay is a freelance photographer and illustrator who lives with his partner Linda and two boarder collies in Cornwall, UK. A keen photographer for over 30 years he's been doing Photo-a-Day since December 2002, recently restarting after a break of 247 days.

Note: all images in this section © David Mingay

PADing – The development of the community

The concept of 'A Photo A Day For A Year' is not a new one. There are many examples of the concept from pre-digital, pre-www days. The earliest web-based ones I'm aware of were started in 2002, though there is (at least) one web based photo-a-day site that has got photos going back to 1998 – the project is a man who has taken a head and shoulders portrait of himself every day. I've also come across someone who photographed every meal he ate for a year!

There was a thriving PAD community on pbase long before the origins of the meta gallery or the PaD forum. In chronological terms, mine was the first on pbase (31st December 2002), with two others (Karen Nicholls and Nikki Harman) starting a day later. By the middle of the year (2003), there were seven Photo a Day galleries, Linda's, then Paul Walters, then Michael Hess and Faye White. For whatever reason, there was a surge in new starters in the summer of 2003, then another surge when New Year Resolutions meant there was another large batch starting on 1st Jan 2004.

In the early days, people found each other just through the 'recently updated galleries' lists. This was time consuming and a bit 'hit and miss' because there were many gallery names that were being used. There was a clear need for an easier way to find other PADers.

Thankfully Jeanne came to the rescue with her links page, where she listed, in chronological order the people taking the challenge, with a photo from their gallery. This started two/three 'prequels' to the meta-gallery – Jeanne stopped her page of links after the first 100 photo-a-day galleries – I think she found it too much effort to keep it up to date when people were starting and then dropping out. Michael Bo Hansen had a similar page, which is still live as I write this. I think he did six months then stopped. Alon Brik did a 'second 100' which I think Mark Hemhauser (Jeanne's brother) continued.

Before the meta-gallery, there was a real 'community spirit' that built up around, in particular, Jeanne's link page. Partly because of the ease of finding other challengers and partly because once found, those doing a photo a day were effectively encouraging and helping along all those doing the challenge. We used to support one another through bad times and times of drought with encouraging comments and other support. I suppose you could say that the very fact of giving a gallery the title 'a photo a day' or stating the intention to do a photo a day is, in itself, the ultimate challenge. It was exciting to find that more and more people were committing to the challenge. This broadened the community and made it more diverse.

PAD galleries such as Pall Gudjonssen's Icelandic one and Bill Burke from Alaska's opened up worlds that would otherwise have remained a mystery to us all. Equally, the photographic talents of the likes of Ian Chappell, Angela Johnson and Penny Roots (among others) gave many something to aspire to and to drive for.

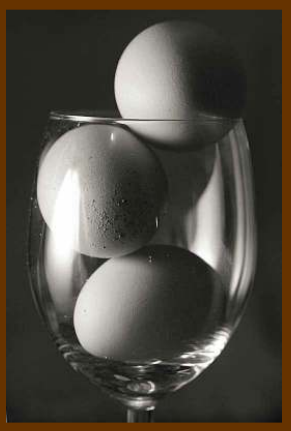
Flowers for Jeanne – one of the earliest in PAD themes – Jan 2004

The 'challenges' between padders have been going on since the very early days. They gave people new trains of thought in times of drought and helped to give people subjects and focus.

The first one we can recall was when we all posted flowers for Jeanne on New Year's Day in 2004 because her 'glue' (the links page she managed) meant the disparate individuals started to thrive as a real community. 'Apples for Ian' (Jan 10 2004) came next – Ian Chappell was complaining every time someone posted pics of apples because 'he wanted to do some apple shots' but he didn't want to be 'in a crowd' so a group of us all posted shots of apples as a bit of a tease.

For some reason (it may have been Jill's idea), it was decided that the PADers should all post pics of themselves in pyjamas on 22nd Feb 2003, leading to some really memorable self-portraits! Mooching around in Jeanne's links page that day was really very funny!

PAD NOTES



Eggs in a wine glass Dec 2004

"The concept of 'A Photo A Day For A Year' is not a new one. There are many examples of the concept from pre-digital, pre-www days. The earliest web-based ones I'm aware of were started in 2002, though there is (at least) one web based photo-a-day site that has got photos going back to 1998 – the project is a man who has taken a head and shoulders portrait of himself every day. I've also come across someone who photographed every meal he ate for a year!"

Black and White week started on 23 February 2004 and many PADers participated in this challenge.

Ian Chappell and Jeanne started Self-Portrait Friday as a joke and it went on and on and on, with some people still posting self portraits on Fridays to this day. I doubt that many who do it now even remember Ian C's gallery so don't know why they do it other than 'people do'.

One of the ones I think of as most memorable, was 'shoes for Linda' (Mar 16th 2003), which came about because Linda had received a 'guest' comment saying she was dirty and unsanitary after she posted a photo of her feet on the sofa in her new shoes. Linda was upset, wrote something about it in her diary and the following day, dozens of shots of people wearing their shoes on the sofa appeared. The meta-gallery was full of them! Hilarious. The PaDers got in a bit of hot water for that as we all voted for each others shoe pics. Abuse of the voting system they (the non-PADding community) complained.

NYC- my PAD the day I arrived in NYC. Taken from Lara's car on the way from JFK - 2004

There were some peculiar customs that grew up among PADers, including posting a self-portrait in the bath if one of their galleries got to the #1 slot in the popular galleries. This stemmed again from Ian Chappell, who boasted that he would post a naked-in-the-bath self portrait if his PAD got to no. 1. It went on from there. (Dare I say, I suspect there was a little more 'vote-rigging' going on so a bigger and bigger circle of PADers ended up in the tub.)

For me personally, 2004 was a year of self imposed themes. Stuck for an idea one day, I photographed three eggs in a wine glass. This led on to similar shots featuring light-bulbs, christmas tree lights, christmas baubles, moldy carrots, as well as other PaDers variations on the same theme. One week I photographed nothing but Coke bottles, another week, my bare feet featured in every shot. When I was ill one time, I printed out an old SP as a mask to hide behind. Little did I know what I was starting. When I made the mask available for download, it started to appear in all sorts of locations in various PaDs, my favorite being 'Mt DMmore' where my head had been photoshopped over the carved heads at Mt Rushmore. Alas, it seems that image is no longer on PBase and to my shame, I've forgotten who did it. It's sad that much of early PaD work has now gone.

A truly world wide co-operative venture was the World Wide Wig. Started by Jeanne, a purple wig travelled the world. The gallery seems to be gone, or at least I can't find it, but for those who were around at the time, this was the project to be part of. While the wig was sent from location to location, the PaD world followed its progress and watched as it appeared in more and more bizarre photographs.

World wide wig project- the wig comes to me in Feb 2005

The first 'pbase meet up' as far as we know, was the New York meeting between myself and Linda from the UK, Jeanne from San Francisco, Jill Burhans from Alabama, Mark Hemhauser from Washington and NYC resident Lara Sargologo. It came about because Linda was going to Princeton on business and she asked me if I fancied a weekend in New York, which of course, with the lure of B&H, I did. She then set about contacting some of our pbase 'friends' to see whether there was any support for a meet-up. In the event, there were six of us enjoying some early spring sunshine over the weekend of 28th March 2004. Although only six were there, it felt as though the eyes of the whole of the pbase world were focused on us that weekend. It was a great joy to spend time with a lovely bunch of people and others around the globe were looking in on what we were doing and remotely participating.

Since then, there have been many more meet-ups, in many locations. We went back to the USA the following year and met another crowd of pbasers on the west coast, we've also met with many people here in the UK, most recently Bill Miller and David Anderson in the Lake District. Clearly there are also other meetings going on all of the time.

This time of year is one when we see lots of new people start 'PAD'ding, we also see those who have found that they enjoyed it so much they're back for more. (That includes me of course.)

"One of the ones I think of as most memorable, was 'shoes for Linda' (Mar 16th 2003), which came about because Linda had received a 'guest' comment saying she was dirty and unsanitary after she posted a photo of her feet on the sofa in her new shoes. Linda was upset, wrote something about it in her diary and the following day, dozens of shots of people wearing their shoes on the sofa appeared. The meta-gallery was full of them! Hilarious. The PaDers got in a bit of hot water for that as we all voted for each others shoe pics. Abuse of the voting system they (the non-PADding community) complained."

PAD-CORNER: I Challenge you !

In this article, Lee Rud comments on the lively challenges of the PBase PAD (Photo A Day) community and how it helps bring photographers together.

Lee Rudd has lived in many places in England and Scotland, plus some time in Gibraltar. Now settled in rural Devon, he enjoys the countryside, food, drink and travel, not necessarily in that order. After many years of film photography, he really appreciates the instant feedback possible from digital photography. He currently uses a Fujfilm S3 Pro.

I started my Picture a Day (PaD) in December 2004, since then I've tried to follow my own simple rules.
Ensure that a photo is taken every day to be posted and have fun!

I think I have managed to follow both rules during my time, and definitely enjoyed the fun aspect.
I've met – online and in person – some wonderful people who just happen to be excellent photographers as well. And I know that my photography has improved, a realisation that many other PaDers have made from their own photography, judging by some of the comments that I have received.

But what to photograph? Like many people I have chosen to photograph the world around me, whether it be local scenery, on holiday, something that took my attention at home, anything!

Taking part in PaD itself is a challenge, how to deliver an image every day, how to work the image into your normal life and how to develop yourself photographically. For me, the last of these factors is the one I want to achieve most, although I realise I don't hit that every day, I try!

I realised early on that I needed to have some sort of structure to my photo-taking. That doesn't mean that I follow the structure every day, but over the long term my picture taking does fit into it. Thematic challenges to myself have occurred several times during my PaD. Some have been long-term, one of which is a fascination with the Dartmoor pony, which is a miniature pony peculiar to this part of England.

On the Gallop © Lee Rudd
Dartmoor ponies galloping. The ponies are a recurring subject of mine, very approachable and very animated!

Themes can also be a short term series, such as Ann LT's excellent My Hands... As Is series. Such series explore the differences in detail that can be revealed in the same subject.

Summer Time - ©Lee Rudd
This image marked the start of summer time, and is a Photoshopped montage. Started a short series based around the clock.

During this time I had been developing a style. I am still not sure how to describe mine, but I know that others have noticed a style that has improved and developed over time, and I have noted the same in others photography.

I have attended several UK PBase meets. Before the first one, I was concerned about what we would do all day. Well, other than sitting around drinking chocolate (or something a little stronger) it is so interesting to note how so many people in the same place see things differently…. Some focussing in on detail, others on textures, colour or anything else that takes their fancy. Sometimes I am sure I haven't been in the same place as them! There is surprisingly little chat about photo equipment, other than the odd Canon-Nikon taunting, the conversations do revolve around life, the universe and the subject at hand.

Now, about the Thursday Challenge. This started off from an offhand comment between one of my good pbase friends Bev Harrison and myself. We were looking for something to stretch ourselves, and as our photographic interests were similar, thought it would be fun for a few weeks. In December 2005, we started innocuously, with a "Still Life, containing a Light Source" challenge. At this time, we hadn't publicised anything, except when we posted the images. Even then, it was apparent that our own styles were still present, even coupled with the same subject!

Six weeks or so later, in January 2006, we noted that more and more people were taking part in the challenges, despite us only posting the subject when we posted our own images. We were also starting to receive requests to post the subject earlier! So we did, eventually ending up posting

Breaking the Rules
© Lee Rudd
The Challenge? Take a creative photo and break compositional rules! The challenge proved very educational for photographers and viewers!

Is that a fork ?
© Faye White
Cutlery and sensuality meet!

A Very nice Red
© Bev Harrison
Bev's very first challenge photo displays her style!

the subject on the PBase PaD discussion forum on Tuesdays – the day that we found best to notify Australian PaDer's well enough in advance to make their plans.

Coming up with a challenge idea isn't easy. Sometimes we have a fixed date to work to, like Birthdays. Bev and I share a birthday, so we were able to make that weeks challenge about 'Celebration'. More often than not though, it has to be some, apparently random, subject.

A good topic has to be International – understood easily, not only by English, Americans, and other English speakers, but also by others who don't use English as their prime language.
Not seasonal – for example, Spring and Autumn challenges are not straightforward because of the differences in the timing of seasons, not just between the north and south hemispheres but also within the same country.
Not technically restrictive – something that doesn't require a user to have a particular type of camera. Not all PaDer's use Digital SLR's.
Reasonably simple – something that doesn't require a specific or expensive props.

After one particularly eventful challenge, we also have to bear in mind another rule for a good challenge. Something that you can't be arrested for! The "Supermarket Sweep" challenge revealed that not only do many of us frequent the drink areas of supermarkets, but that several photographers incurred the wrath of vigilant staff. Something to remember is that such places are private property. Please note that Bev and myself cannot afford to post bail for you!

Friends are Coming ! © Bev Harrison
Supermarket Dash challenge – nearly led to the arrest of several challenge participants!

I've continued on my personal themes as well. In 2006 I had a "Straight from the Camera" and "Nighttime" months. During these months I've tried to fit in the challenge to the theme that I have chosen. This isn't that easy, as a generalist challenge can't always be adapted easily. But I try, and have a lot of fun trying as well.

I know that I have learned a lot while looking through the challenge entries every week. From "what is it?", to "How did they do that?" and beyond. One week, we chose "Breaking the Rules" to prove that there is no need to be tied into the traditional Photographic compositional rules. In fact, is there any harm in not knowing them?

There is no compulsion to take part in any of the challenges. Nor does it have to be a PaD. Indeed, the Thursday challenge is not meant to have any formal rules, except perhaps that the images should be posted on a Thursday! Why Thursday? Well I cannot actually remember! I think it may be because it was long enough after the weekend to have us think about a subject for the challenge and execute the photo! Oh, and not to interfere with Self Portrait Friday – another accidental PaD institution!

A challenge does not restrict the photographer's style. Instead, the style is evident in the picture that is produced. An everyday object can be transformed into a sensual, fine art image.

One of the most popular images to be produced in response to the challenges is "Stepping!" by Carole Stevens. This reached number 1 in the most popular images that week. Here is her story of that image. *(ed: see sidebar for image)*

"After a day of photo taking, my partner Dave and I saw a lovely old railway bridge with broken rickety steps leading to the railway line. Dave climbed down to look for any possible photos for me, and as he was walking across the train-track looking for photos I snapped a few shots, watching out for trains at the same time of course!

I was unaware of the challenge subject until I got home. Viewing the day's images, I came up with the idea of using multiple Daves. I used three basic images of Dave, altered slightly to make each Dave different. After 30 minutes and many layers, I was satisfied enough with the image, although I would have liked more time to alter the colour. And of course a big thank you to Dave for bravely risking life and limb for my photography!"

This is a fantastic, and original image, one of many from the various challenges to reach the lofty parts of the most popular images page.
At a recent PBase meet, the subject of the Challenges came up. Comments about "keeping me awake every Wednesday night" were heard. Bev and I have one response to this – "just think what we are thinking the other six nights of the week!"

We don't make any claim to be original with the concept of a challenge, and both of us are somewhat overwhelmed by the response from many other PBase members. The challenge is really a lot of fun, and it is wonderful to see the inventive images every week.

Don't forget that there are other challenge forums on PBase, such as the CSLR and Sony Challenges, or you may want to investigate one of the photo competition web sites such as dpchallenge.com or shutterbugs.biz.

Thirsty
© Faye White
Humour, a lovely cat and excellent photography meet the Water challenge

Night Light
© Lee Rudd
A dual-purpose image, meeting both my own personal nighttime project, and also a Thursday challenge "Nightlights"

Stepping
© Carole Stevens
A Thursday Challenge masterpiece!

PBASE-CORNER: Interview with Slug & Emily

It's been over a year since we last interviewed the dynamic duo who run PBase. A lot has happened since then, including some great new services from PBase like custom framing and printing, increased storage space, better servers, a much larger team for support and implementation and more. On a personal front, Chuck and Emily have recently been blessed with a daughter in December, who I am sure is keeping the duo more than busy. Molly & I got a hold of Slug and Emily amidst all of this and conducted an email interview. As Slug puts it *"Writing is my nemesis. Unlike programming, you can never know if it's correct or not so it's a slow process for me."*

PBase Magazine: This is our second interview with you since we started this magazine in 2005. How has PBase evolved over this year ?

The biggest evolution for PBase over the past year has been the people we have added to the team. We have been able to greatly improve customer support and devote more time to expanding and improving PBase, rather than spending the bulk of our time maintaining what is already there. We have been able to make some big improvements to the hardware architecture of our servers and add some great new features for our customers.

PBM: A lot of people love PBase for its simplicity while others feel it lacks essential features. In the past, you have preferred speed and simplicity over features. But of late, PBase has introduced features such as slideshows and printing to name a few. Would you say that is due to an evolution in your perception of what PBase should be?

No, it's not an evolution in our perception of PBase, but a change allowed by adding to the PBase team. With more people working on things, we now have the manpower to devote to new features that our customers would really enjoy, such as slideshows and printing. Before these additions to the team, all of our time was taken up by maintaining existing features and functionality.

PBM: How many people does PBase employ today and what do they do ? Do you think the current team size is sufficient ?

Currently, the PBase team consists of Slug, Emily, Kathy, Brian, Chris, and Molly. Everyone plays a huge role in the maintenance of the site, but we could certainly use more help, particularly in the area of developing new features. We would love to expand the PBase team right away, but our office space is currently full. We are planning to move into a larger space in a couple of months, which will allow us to hire some more folks.

Kathy, Brian, and Molly work with customer support. Molly also handles communication with camera manufacturers to help keep our camera database up-to-date.

Chris is a programmer - always working hard on new features and improving the user interface of existing features. Since his sole task is programming, he has time to work on all kinds of things that Slug and Emily would have loved to do, but just haven't had the time.

Slug spends much of his time managing the business aspects of PBase as well as maintaining servers and making improvements to the server architecture to provide more speed and stability to the site. For the past year, he has spent the rest of his time working on the business end of the printing and framing service.
Emily handles higher-level customer support, shares business management with Slug, works on creating new features whenever possible, and, for the past 9 months, has been working on the newest addition to the PBase team - Lucy Jane Neel. It will be a while before she can type, but she has already made a cute addition to the team.

PBM: For companies such as PBase LLC, with such a high amount of real-time traffic, how does one handle software updates ? When you create new features, or fix broken ones, how do you typically test & upload them without service interruption ? Put another way, tell us what in the PBase architecture easily allows for real-time upgrades without interruption.

Basically, we use a Concurrent Versions System (CVS) for storing our PERL files that generate all of the pages on PBase. We have a set of servers that handle page requests from everyone by executing the current version of the various files. We make changes to the code in development environments, and once changes are ready to go live, we store them in CVS as a new version of the file. Then, we tell the web servers to start using the newest version of the files, which they can do without any down time.

PBM: There has been a lot of talk on Amazon's S3 infrastructure and the fact that for a small business, it offers significant cost savings, considering the reliability and availability it provides. What is your take on this ?

There are certainly many aspects of S3 that make it a tempting option. However, it is very scary to rely on someone else to maintain your files. Outsourcing file storage could also take away the ability that we currently have to optimize configurations for our specific needs. In any case, S3 is something we will continue to keep an eye on and consider as a possibility for the future of PBase.

PBM: When a 'service' is first started, the creators usually start with a simple and sometimes philanthropic mission statement. In your case, PBase was first started as a free service for 'fellow' photographers, to be used in a spirit of camaraderie. Now that PBase is a much larger

CHEERS!

Lucy Jane Neel – the latest addition to the PBase team. Congratulations, Slug & Emily. May all of you grow from strength to strength !

"The biggest evolution for PBase over the past year has been the people we have added to the team. We have been able to greatly improve customer support and devote more time to expanding and improving PBase, rather than spending the bulk of our time maintaining what is already there. We have been able to make some big improvements to the hardware architecture of our servers and add some great new features for our customers"

beast, has paying customers and has encountered the usual growth pains of harwdware, software and people, what are your key learnings about running a service that eventually needs to become a business ?

The most important part of the business is the people who make it happen. During 2006, we've grown from two to six people and there's been a lot to learn. Adding more people has been very helpful since it necessitates better organization. Our software itself has improved because now we have multiple people working simultaneously on the same project. Emily has built many software tools for internal use which has made customer support faster and better. We hope to be able to hire a few more people in 2007, we definitely need the help. The framework we've been building this year should allow more people to jump right in and contribute more efficiently.

PBM: In the photo hosting market, is subscriber churn a major issue, or does one, on average, get more new subscribers than lost subscribers over a unit of time ?

Customers come and go for various reasons. We hope as we continue to grow our team and improve the site, there will be more reasons for people to want to stick around.

The photo hosting market as a whole is growing right now as more people get digital cameras and spend more time online, and PBase has certainly been experiencing this growth, with the number of customers increasing over time.

PBM: Does Slug still take photos ? His PBase galleries are as 'recent' as Jan 2006 !

Good photography takes effort. Most of our creative energy in the last few years has been going towards PBase. With the recent arrival of our first child, we'll at least have the motivation to take documentary photos. Hopefully having the camera back in hand will get the artistic juices flowing again. I still love the feel of pushing the shutter button.

PBM: Has married life changed the 'backend' management of PBase in anyway?

[Emily:] Now that we're married, Slug says he has a "boss" to answer to, but nothing has really changed. We were together constantly and working together on PBase before, and we're still doing it now. It does mean that dinner every night turns into a business meeting, but that's just fine with us.

PBM: The mandatory geek question: Please tell us what runs PBase today (Hardware, Software and network layout)

The biggest upgrade in 2006 was the migration of the primary storage hardware to a NetApp system. NetApp is the top-of-the-line storage vendor and the benefits to manageability, scalability, and robustness are great. The primary database server is a Sun V890 running Oracle. This went online last February and it's been performing really well since then. In fact, we haven't even rebooted the database machine since February. Now that we have the solid backbone in place, we can concentrate on fine tuning the 30+ Linux boxes which are clustered around the Sun and the NetApp.

"There are certainly many aspects of S3 that make it a tempting option. However, it is very scary to rely on someone else to maintain your files. Outsourcing file storage could also take away the ability that we currently have to optimize configurations for our specific needs"

"The photo hosting market as a whole is growing right now as more people get digital cameras and spend more time online, and PBase has certainly been experiencing this growth, with the number of customers increasing over time"

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PARTING SHOTS

The Camera Phone

A few weeks ago some friends invited me to a big concert in New York City. When the main performer appeared on stage, almost in unison, everyone in the audience started snapping pictures. The concert venue allowed photographs to be taken, but I was surprised by the device used to capture the moment: a phone. Yes, in a sea of thousands I spotted only two regular cameras, barring those that belonged to the press. There I was, too, with my Motorola Q snapping photographs with a 1.3 megapixel lens and a 6x digital zoom. My phone even has a bright flash that could definitely double as a flashlight in case of an emergency!

I began thinking about what this means for the future of the photography industry. Here I was in a room filled with people mostly under the age of 35 – the next generation of photographers and we were all using phones with relatively poor resolution. But it makes sense. In the age where everyone carries a ton of electronics around every day, from iPods to Palm Pilots to cell phones, it is much easier to leave the camera at home and rely on the phone that is already weighing down your pocket. Since most people today always have their cell phones with them, there is no need to add the big lenses and clunky Nikon to one's load in order to snap a memory.

Today, *everyone* with a cell phone is a potential photographer who can e-mail a photo around the world, immediately after the photo is taken. At every concert, parade, anniversary, birthday or vacation, camera phones can be seen. Easy to carry, easy to snap and easy to forward to friends and family, this new technology is a must. The only (potentially major) hiccup in this entirely new explosion of digital photography is the quality of the photographs. *PC Magazine's* Lance Ulanoff begged college graduates, in his column titled "Camera Phones Kill Memories," to make sure to use a good digital camera during graduation. He wrote, "A camera phone leaves you with one set of crappy *[sic]* images. Ultimately, those seeking to capture memories need to think not only of the moment, but of the future. If all is well, there will be tears of nostalgia and happiness rather than frustration that they should have used a *real* camera."

The camera phone is also bringing photojournalism to new levels, by making YOU (a la *Time Magazine*'s Person of the Year) the photojournalist. WNEP 16 (Northeastern and Central Pennsylvania local news), has an entire page on their web site devoted to citizen journalism via the camera phone. They ask citizens to send in photos of breaking news with

their cell phones. Citizen photojournalism, via the camera phone, has helped the public to see

stories they might otherwise have missed. This was exemplified when United States Representative John Sweeney (R NY-20), on April 22, 2006, decided to crash a Union College fraternity party. None of the frat brothers had high tech digital (or film) cameras, but everyone had their cell phones. Photographs from the students' cell phones were all the press needed to run a story about a Congressman partying with frat boys.

The evolution of photography is once again in full swing, bringing digital to new and exciting heights. Camera phones are making a splash, threatening the old to make room for the new. What will be next!?

If you have taken a great photo with your cell phone, email it to magazine@pbase.com, with "Blog" in the subject, and we will display them on the PBase Magazine Blog.

Can't wait to hear from you!

Cheers,
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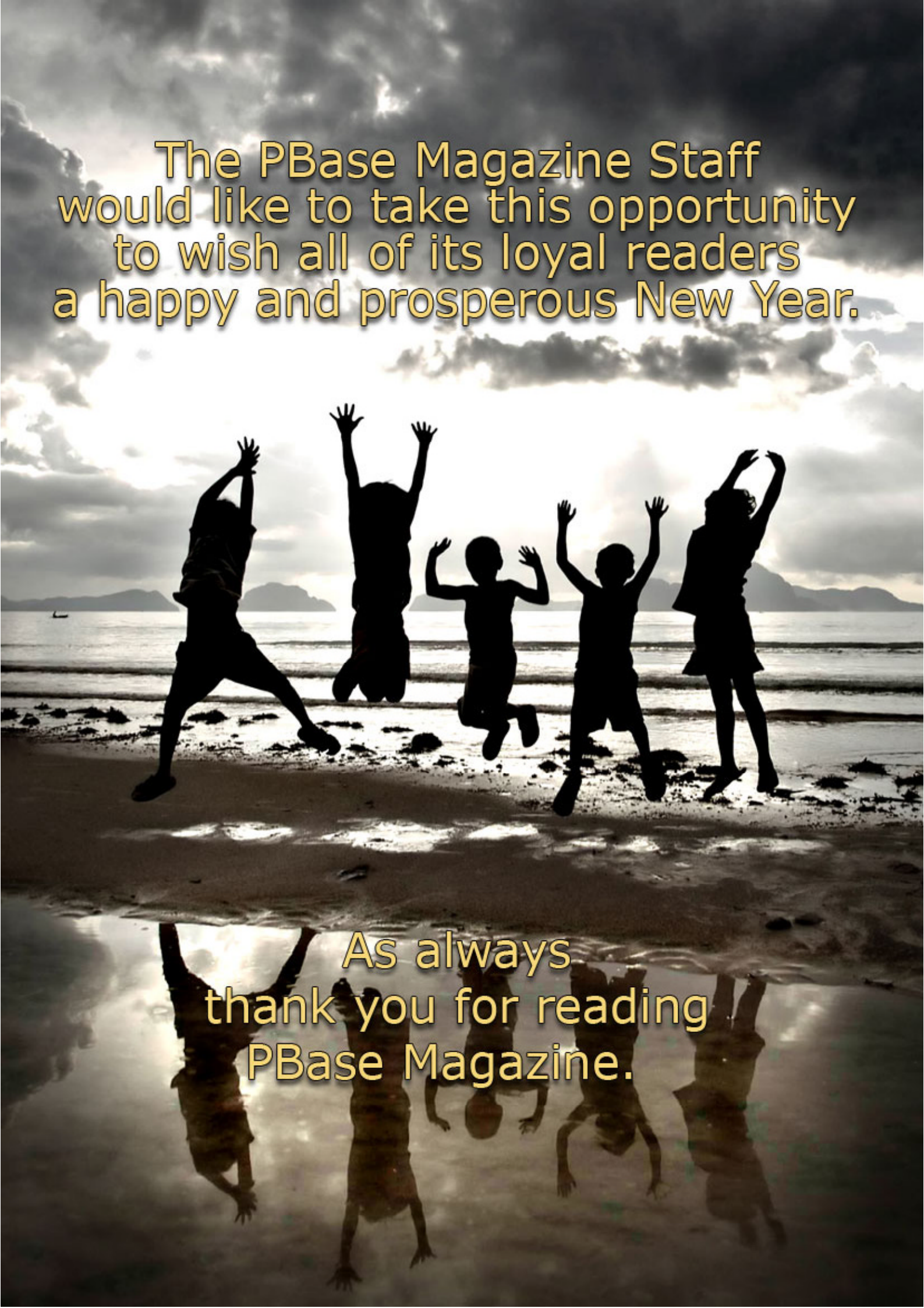
The PBase Magazine Staff
would like to take this opportunity
to wish all of its loyal readers
a happy and prosperous New Year.
As always
thank you for reading
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